

INTRODUCE

Well, if you have your Bibles, and I hope you do,

- please grab them and turn to 1 Samuel chapter 16.
- You can open a phone or a tablet to 1 Samuel 16,
- or you can use one of the hard-backed black bibles
 - under every single chair.
 - You'll find 1 Samuel 16 on page **238**.

INTRODUCTION

So, today's text is a difficult passage.

- In fact, when I Googled this passage, it showed up...
- as one of the most difficult verses to deal with in the Bible.

Most preachers don't even deal with it in sermon series.

- They just skip it altogether,
- because it is sandwiched between two very famous passages.

Last week we saw the Lord choose David and anoint him.

- And we read that uber famous verse 7:
 - "For the LORD sees not as man sees:
 - man looks on the outward appearance,
 - but the LORD looks on the heart."
- So, that's a big-time preaching verse.

And then next week we hit maybe the most famous story in the entire Bible!

- Like seriously, more people probably know David and Goliath
 - than know the Christmas story!

But our text today is really, really hard. Here's how it starts, verse 14:

1 SAMUEL 16:14

[14] Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the LORD tormented him.

So, yeah...this one is tough.

Now, we'll cover what it means...

- for the Spirit of the LORD to DEPART from someone.

AND we'll discuss what it means...

- that a harmful spirit can TORTURE someone...
- oh, and by the way...that it's from the LORD!

But in my study this week, I really think this text is primarily about the doctrine of **SLIDE GOD'S PROVIDENCE**

EXPLAIN: PROVIDENCE

The exact term *providence* is not found in Scripture,

- but it is a doctrine usually referring...
- to God's ongoing relationships to his creation.

How "active" is God in our day to day lives?

So, there are some common errors in how people think about God's relationship to creation:

- Some believe in *DEISM*...
 - which essentially teaches that God created the world,
 - but now he's hands off.
 - He set this thing into motion,
 - but now he's distant and uninvolved.

- Other believe in *CHANCE* or *randomness*.
 - The events in our world...
 - are really just up to chance,
 - or luck,
 - or even coincidence.
- While others believe in an impersonal *FATE* or *determinism*.
 - We are nothing more that pawns on a giant chessboard...
 - with no agency of our own.

But Biblical theology teaches God's Providence.

Providence means that:

God is personally and continually involved with all created things.

- He sustains his creation.
- He cooperatively works with his creation.
- And he directs them to fulfill his purposes.

TRANSITION

So, we're going to work through how we see God's Providence in this text,

- and I believe it will give us some good things to think on
- and to apply to our lives.

1 Samuel 16, verse 14:

1 SAMUEL 16:14–17

[14] Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the LORD tormented him. [15] And Saul's servants said to him, "Behold now, a harmful spirit from God is tormenting you. [16] Let our lord

now command your servants who are before you to seek out a man who is skillful in playing the lyre, and when the harmful spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will be well.” [17] So Saul said to his servants, “Provide for me a man who can play well and bring him to me.”

EXPLAIN: SAUL’S REJECTION

So, this section begins with a contrast to verse 13.

Verse 14 is really a companion verse to 13,

- because last week we ended...
 - with the Spirit of the Lord rushing upon David.
- And today we open...
 - with the Spirit of the Lord departing from Saul.

Saul had directly disobeyed God on two occasions,

- he was obstinate...
- and didn’t heed Samuel’s warning for him to repent.
 - So, God removed His Spirit from Saul.

The king...

- who would not submit to God,
 - receives judgment from God.

So, this is meant to be seen as divine judgment.

EXPLAIN: EVIL SPIRIT

But, let’s talk about this harmful spirit,

- or some of your translations might say an *evil* spirit,
- which is a fine translation as well.

Some modern scholars want to reduce this *evil spirit*

- to a merely psychological
- or mental disturbance.

That's how they want to explain this thing in non-supernatural terms.

But you cannot reduce this verse...

- to simply mean that Saul went into a deep pit of depression...
 - although it certainly seems like it resulted in that.

But that seems to be a symptom, not the sickness.

It's just really hard to get away from the fact...

- that the text seems to be presenting...
- that this is an external power afflicting Saul.
 - **A harmful spirit from the Lord tormented him.**

Now, you may say,

- *"An evil spirit...*
- *from the Lord!?!"*
- *This is terrible!"*
 - And it is!
- *"What kind of God does this?"*

So, what do we do with God...

- causing,
- or allowing for,
- or even using this spirit to torment Saul?

What do we do with that?

POINT 1

Well, this really does cut to the quick, and it's here I want to make my first point concerning God's providence.

GOD'S PROVIDENCE can be seen in **SLIDE TRAGEDY**

Listen, in the scriptures,

- the Lord is sovereign over everything!
- Even our tragedies.

You see, the Bible doesn't portray evil...

- as an equal and opposite power to God.
- No! God is in control of every aspect...even evil.

He **removed His Spirit from Saul** and **allowed an evil spirit to torment him**.

QUESTION 1

Now, this raises a couple of questions.

First, does God still take his Spirit from people?

Well, I think it's important to understand how the Spirit of God worked in the Old Testament.

Before Jesus Christ,

- the Holy Spirit would sometimes empower or protect people.
 - But it was pretty rare...not everyone had the Spirit!
- And the Spirit would come and go...
 - dependent on the season and the person's response.

So, David wrote these words in Psalm 51...

- after being caught in his sin with Bathsheba and against Uriah.
- And just I wonder if he's thinking back to his days with Saul?

SLIDE PSALM 51:10–11

[10] Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.

[11] Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

TRAGEDY SLIDE

So, that's how the Spirit worked in the Old Testament.

- But NOW there is a FULLER work of the Holy Spirit...
- after the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2.

In the Old Testament...

- the Holy Spirit had not come in the same way...
- that God promised he would come under the new covenant.

So, if you are a Christian,

- the Holy Spirit does not come and go,
 - based on how you're doing with him.
- Rather, he dwells in you,
- and seals you permanently.

QUESTION 2

The other question, though, is...

Does God still send **evil spirits to torment** people today?

Well, there are examples of individuals in the New Testament being turned over to Satan or demons for punishment.

- In Acts chapter 5,
 - God allowed Ananias and Sapphira...
 - to be filled with the spirit of Satan...
 - as a warning and example to the early church.
- In 1 Corinthians 5,
 - a man in the church was committing incest and adultery,
 - and Paul commanded the leaders...
 - to “deliver this man to Satan”
 - to destroy his sinful nature and save his soul.

And in 2 Corinthians 12, we find this text about the Apostle Paul:

SLIDE 2 CORINTHIANS 12:7

[7] So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

EXPLAIN: PAUL’S THORN

God sends a messenger of Satan to harass Paul.

- Who’s got this in their theological perspective?
- God’s doling out demons to our boy, Paul!

But the messenger was to keep Paul from the sin of pride!

- So, it had a purpose!

And did you notice that he said, **A thorn was GIVEN me.**

- Paul didn't ask for it.
- And Paul didn't cause it.
- Paul was just given it.
 - A judgement on King Saul, I can see that!
 - But the Apostle Paul!?!
 - WHAT!!!

And this is for us today, church:

SLIDE TRAGEDY is often given.

- Listen, you've been GIVEN some thorns...
 - that you didn't cause.
- You've been GIVEN some tragedy...
 - that you didn't ask for.
- **But just because you didn't ask for it,**
- **doesn't mean that God isn't going to use it.**

Every one of us could come and share stories of storms in our lives...

Now, we may not use the language of Paul...

- calling our trials **messengers of Satan.**

But it would seem to me...

- that God does allow these things today...
 - no longer as judgment, like in Saul's case!
- But He does so with the purpose...
 - of our good
 - and His glory.

TRANSITION

So, that's the first point of this text.

GOD'S PROVIDENCE can be seen in TRAGEDY.

Let's move on. Verse 18:

1 SAMUEL 16:18-20

[18] One of the young men answered, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the LORD is with him." [19] Therefore Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, "Send me David your son, who is with the sheep." [20] And Jesse took a donkey laden with bread and a skin of wine and a young goat and sent them by David his son to Saul.

EXPLAIN: JUST SO HAPPENED

So, this next section is brilliant!

- One of the guys in Saul's entourage...
- JUST SO HAPPENS to know about...
- this youngest son of Jesse the Bethlehemite!

WHAT!!?!?!?

How is this possible?

- Last week, even Jesse forgot about David!
 - His own father didn't even consider him
 - to be brought before Samuel!

But some random dude JUST SO HAPPENS to know about him?!?

- And it's not like Saul's just hanging out in Bethlehem...
 - They're in Gibeah!
 - More than 30 miles away!

How is it that David...

- JUST SO HAPPENS to be filled with the Spirit...
 - when Saul JUST SO HAPPENS to have lost the Spirit?
- And David JUST SO HAPPENS to come to the aid's mind?
- AND David JUST SO HAPPENS to have the necessary skills...
 - to help the current king...
- who JUST SO HAPPENS to have been rejected as king...

Oh, and David JUST SO HAPPENS to be the newly anointed king!

POINT 2

It's my second point.

GOD'S PROVIDENCE can be seen in **SLIDE STRATEGY**

- Part of God taking his Spirit from Saul...
 - And giving this harmful spirit to Saul...
- is to further his STRATEGY...
- to get David to the palace.

EXPLAIN: TWO HANDS

Now, I've taught on this before...but God has two hands in how he works.

- One hand is VISIBLE...
- and the other, INVISIBLE.

God often works through his VISIBLE hand of MIRACLES...

- burning bushes...
- parting the Red Sea...
- throwing fire and brimstone from the sky...
- healing people...
- giving visions...
- answering prayers.

Those are the works of God's VISIBLE hand of MIRACLES.

But God also works in more subtle ways...

- through his INVISIBLE hand of PROVIDENCE.
- And that's what's at work here!

It's like the text is screaming,

"Don't you see the hand of God at work here?"

ILLUSTRATION: HALLMARK

I've historically illustrated like this:

my wife, Maryse has an affinity for really bad Hallmark movies.

- Anyone else brave enough to admit this?
 - This is a safe place to admit it!
 - Come on!
 - That was a lie!
 - The elders are taking note...
 - for church discipline purposes.

But let's be real...Hallmark movies are terrible. Ok!

And they're all the exact same movie!

Here's how they go:

- There's a big city girl who works for a real-estate developer...
- who just so happens to end up in her small, home-town...
- where there just so happens to be a historic family property...
 - that she's trying to develop into condos.
- And the homeowner just so happens to be her childhood crush.
 - And he's a struggling children's book author...
- And as the love spark begins to grow...
 - They just so happen to find themselves in a moment...
 - where they gaze longingly into each other's eyes...
- This moment comes usually as a result...
 - of an accidental touch of the hand,
 - or the man teaching the woman how to do something...
 - like fish,
 - knead dough,
 - or shoot a bow and arrow.
- But by the end...
 - she has settled in her hometown...
 - is married to her new husband...
 - and they run a real-estate company
 - /children's book publisher...
 - out of the historical family property.

IT'S THE SAME MOVIE EVERY TIME!

And I watch these movies with Maryse, and I'm like,

- "Psshhh...that would never happen!"
- Are you kidding me?
- They JUST SO HAPPENED to bump into each other...
 - at the local diner?
- This is the worst writing in the history of cinema!"

And I say that...

and then look over at my wife...

- and she's just all weepy,
 - "That's just so beautiful!"
 - We need to move to a small town!"

And I ain't no fool...so I go...

- "You're right sweetie!"
- This should win an Oscar!"

EXPLAIN: COINCIDENCE

That's what's going on here.

- And we would chalk it all up to coincidence.

But to the orthodox Israelite there was no such thing as *chance*.

SLIDE PROVERBS 16:33

[33] The lot is cast into the lap,

but its every decision is from the LORD.

Or even in the New Testament:

SLIDE ACTS 17:26-27

[26] And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, [27] that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,

ILLUSTRATION: TRANSPLANTS

How many of you are not native to Colorado?

- You've moved here from somewhere else?
 - Come on...
 - people just admitted they liked Hallmark...
 - you can admit this!

Ok!

- You are part of the traffic problem!

And most of you moved here...

- for work...
- or to live near the mountains...
- or for college...right?

Many have moved here for these reasons. But here's the truth...

- You didn't move here!
- You were sent here!

God determines the periods and the boundaries...why?

- So that we would seek God!

It's God's providential **SLIDE STRATEGY**

- You live where you live...
- You work where you work...
- You play where you play...
- You have the neighbors that you have...

ON PURPOSE!

TRANSITION

GOD is moving David...

- from the pasture...
- to the palace.

No, he is not yet the king...

- but we can see the hand of God moving...
- strategically setting up David's future.

So, we see GOD'S PROVIDENCE

- in TRAGEDY...
- and we see it in his STRATEGY.

Let's finish this text. Verse 21:

1 SAMUEL 16:21-23

[21] And David came to Saul and entered his service. And Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer. [22] And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight." [23] And whenever the harmful spirit from God was upon Saul, David took

the lyre and played it with his hand. So Saul was refreshed and was well, and the harmful spirit departed from him.

POINT 3

So, David shows up, and his musical ability seems to do the trick.

- This ancient version of musical therapy works to soothe Saul,
- and the text says that the harmful spirit departed from him...
 - at least temporarily...
 - as we'll see in future texts, it will return.
- But at least in the short term, he finds relief...
 - through the music of David.

And these verses are where I'll make my last point about God's providence.

GOD'S PROVIDENCE can be seen in **SLIDE MINISTRY**

- God allowed for TRAGEDY...
- And God is using STRATEGY...

To get David where he needs to be, so he can do his MINISTRY.

And Christian,

- I would say this is a model for us...
- as to what our relationship with the unbelieving world...
- should look like.

The temptation can be:

- to remove oneself from the world...
- or to judge and criticize the world...
- but we are given gifts and abilities to minister to the world!
 - To serve the Sauls all around us.

That's what Jesus meant when he called his disciples **the salt of the earth**.

- Salt in those days was primarily used,
 - not for flavor,
- but for preserving meat.

Christian, you are meant to be something of a preservative.

We play a part in restraining, as it were, the decay of this world.

- And when we do,
- those around us should find refreshment,
 - and MAYBE they will even be led to repentance.

Paul says this in Galatians 6:10

SLIDE GALATIANS 6:10

[10] So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

CONCLUSION

SLIDE W/PADS GOD'S PROVIDENCE is seen all through this passage.

- In TRAGEDY,
- in STRATEGY,
- and in MINISTRY.

But you know what's interesting?

In the Bible, theology like this is almost always found in narrative form.

- It's rarely abstracted out into propositions.
 - Like how I just taught it...
- It's almost always found in story-form for us to discover!

And it got me thinking about my JUST SO HAPPENED moments...

SUNRISE CHURCH

It was the summer of 2001 when I became a Christian as a teenager.

- And before I believed in God I was a wreck.
- Things came to a head when I got arrested for shoplifting.
 - Yes, your pastor has been arrested.
 - You're like, "I knew I liked this church!"

And as a part of my sentence, I had to do 50-hours of community service.

- And one of the places I did service hours...
- JUST SO HAPPENED to be a church...
 - called Sunrise Church.

And listen, I had no interest in Jesus...

- I just cleaned the church...
- for community service...
- and that was it.

Until a couple of years later, a friend invited me to go to his youth group.

- And I wasn't seeking at all...
- but we were friends,
- so I went.

And there are like a billion churches in Colorado Springs...

- But as we pull up,
- it JUST SO HAPPENED...
- that he went to the Sunrise Church youth group.

YOUNG LIFE

And that same year, a different friend invited me to go to Young Life...

- which was, like, a Christian club that met in his basement.
 - It was a bunch of people singing songs...
 - and listening to some guy preach...
 - in a basement...
 - sounded like a cult...
 - but I drove a Volkswagen Van and had dreadlocks...
 - so, I was up for whatever.

So, I go to his basement,

- and I noticed a brochure for Young Life,
- with a picture of the, then, President of the organization:
 - Denny Rydberg.

And it JUST SO HAPPENED that I knew Denny.

- He had been my basketball coach the year before.
- But I had no idea he was the leader of an international ministry!

And now I'm hearing a message about Jesus,

- In my buddy's basement,
- and I JUST SO HAPPEN to know
- the president of Young Life personally.

And I started putting these coincidences together in my head.

- What are the chances...
 - that the place I did my community service...
 - WAS the SAME church I was invited to years later?

- And what are the chances...
 - that my basketball coach turns out to be the leader...
 - of a youth ministry where I end up hearing the Gospel?

And I didn't know it then, but this is called the effectual call of God.

- God was after me.
- God was wooing me.
- I just didn't know it.

It just felt like,

- *"There's something here.*
- *This can't be mere coincidence.*
- *I need to get to the bottom of this."*

MORE EXAMPLES

- And I JUST SO HAPPENED
 - to be smart and funny and loud...
- And those skills JUST SO HAPPENED
 - to be why a mentor encouraged me to go into ministry.
- And I JUST SO HAPPENED
 - to go to CCU...
- Where, my roommate introduced me to his childhood friend...
 - who would JUST SO HAPPEN to become my wife.
- And we JUST SO HAPPENED
 - to plant a church...
- And we JUST SO HAPPENED
 - to find this facility in Downtown Littleton...

- And you JUST SO HAPPENED
 - to get invited here,
 - or find us online,
 - or see that wooden sign.

And here we are.

Is it simply chance? Is it random? Is it luck?

HARD STUFF

And listen, it's not all good stuff...but there are hard things.

- My wife JUST SO HAPPENED to have a long-term illness...
- And we JUST SO HAPPENED to have a miscarriage.
- My mom JUST SO HAPPENED to get diagnosed with cancer.
- And I JUST SO HAPPENED to find myself
 - in the grips of depression and anxiety.

So, whether it's TRAGEDY or STRATEGY or MINISTRY...

I am convinced that God's invisible hand of PROVIDENCE is at work...

- in getting me to this point...
- and in getting you here, too!

ENDING

So, the Lord JUST SO HAPPENS to have you here this Sunday...

- listening to this message,
- with whatever is JUST SO HAPPENING in your life right now.

So, I'm gonna pray.

- And then I'm going to invite you...
 - if you're wrestling with this right now...
- to come to the back of the room...
 - just like we always do.

And there are going to be prayer team members back there with name tags

- And I want to invite you to come back and receive prayer...
 - receive ministry.

God JUST SO HAPPENS to have people here to pray with you...

- that you might find refreshment.

The doctrine of GOD'S PROVIDENCE shows us...

- that he is intimately involved in our lives...
- even when we don't see him...
- he is at work.

Let's pray.

RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD’S SUPPER
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – fathomchurch.org/give
- PRAYER - fathomchurch.org/prayer
- SINGING

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Love you church, let’s stand and sing together.

RESOURCES CONSULTED:

- Davis, Dale Ralph. Focus on the Bible. 1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart.
- Davis, Dale Ralph. *The Servant-King.*
- Grudem, Wayne. Systematic Theology.
- McDonald, Richard. 'God Made Me Do It!' Why Did God Tempt Saul with an Evil Spirit?
- Tsumura, David Toshio. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. The First Book of Samuel.