



## The Futility of Antichrist

1 Samuel 22:6-23

Grace Church | 3.14.21

Last week we noticed that chapter 21 of 1 Samuel notes a turn in the narrative for David. No longer does he enjoy the unchallenged favor of the Lord in the same way. Through no fault of his own, his days of public praise are over and he is now forced out of the palace into the wilderness. It's in this place of need and desperation that God continually meets him, and David draws to himself the needy, outcast, poor, and rejected who follow him. David is building his ragtag kingdom, and although it will be years before he is officially appointed as King over Israel, he has become king of the wilderness.

Jesus Christ too appears in a similar manner on earth. He looks to be needy, poor, and desperate. And in his ministry by his lowliness he draws sinners to himself: the poor and the outcast. He takes them under his banner, and before he can be publicly acknowledged as king of the universe, he becomes the king of the wilderness. Jesus speaks of this drawing of men to himself in John 12:31-33.

Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

In other words, the death of Christ is the beacon of God's love: when he is lifted up, all men will be drawn to him. But the tone of this scripture is not just of Christ the lowly, but Christ the conqueror. As he is lifted up, he draws men to himself, but he also *casts out* the ruler of this world. What does Jesus mean? It's simple: there cannot be two on the throne. So as Christ the King ascends to his place, the ruler of this world must descend. Who is the ruler of this world? Jesus speaks again in chapter 16 of John telling us that the ruler of this world will be judged. The apostles John, the same author, tells us in 1 John 5 that "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one."

If you are not catching on yet, let me make it clear for you. The evil one goes by many names, Scripture calls him tempter (Matt 4:3); enemy (Matt 13:39); adversary (1 Pt 5:8); deceiver (Rev 12:19); father of lies (Jn 8:44); murderer (Jn 8:44), sinner (1 Jn 3:8), and even spiritual names like Beelzebul and Belial. His most common names for "Satan" and "devil". He is the great enemy of God's people, the great spoiler<sup>1</sup> of Eden.

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<sup>1</sup> Graham Cole, *Against the Darkness*



You remember a few weeks ago in our study of David and Goliath we discussed the term Typology: persons, places, or things that point to later fulfillment of God's plan. Often we see David presented to us in the Biblical witness as a *type* of Christ. But in Scripture there are also *anti-types*: persons, places, and things that are meant to prefigure the opposite of God's fulfilling plan of redemption. If most of the types of the Old Testament are pointing towards Christ, than these anti-types are not pointing towards Christ, but towards AntiChrist.

And when I say AntiChrist, perhaps some interesting things come to your head. The Scripture warns us, mostly again in 1 and 2 John, that Biblical fulfillment means there will be a singular AntiChrist, who sets himself up against the people of God one last time before the triumph and return of Christ. But 1 John 2:18 tells us this:

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come.

In other words: there is one antichrist coming, but even now many have come, types of the one to come and types of the great Antichrist Satan. Throughout Biblical history we see those who have set themselves up as great enemies of God's people, types of the antichrist to come, antitypes of Christ. And today we begin to see King Saul, at long last, as an antichrist, and it reveals to us a picture of the work of the great antichrist, Satan. What 1 Samuel 22:6-23 shows us is the futility of being antichrist: of working against God, his anointed one, and his people.

And before you think I'm making a leap, I want you to consider how King Saul has made the turn from distressed and disobedient king to full out antichrist. What was the disobedience that caused God to reject Saul as king? He would not obey God's order to destroy Israel's enemies. And yet in our text, Saul has no problem destroying completely not only the people of God, but the priests of God. His suspicion and rage has turned to pure evil, to genocide.

But here is our good news today. The little antichrist Saul is not the one who will be lifted up and draw men to himself. That is David who does that. And so the big Antichrist Satan is not the one lifted up, but as Jesus says, the one who is cast out. Ultimately, even scheme of the our enemy Satan is sheer futility in the hands of our sovereign God. Let's consider first the propaganda of Antichrist, and then the beauty of the providence of God and the suffering Messiah.

## **We Know His Ploys: The propaganda of Antichrist (6-16).**

A few weeks ago we were discussing the attack of Saul on David in community group and a friend said: "I would be really interested to hear a sermon about Satan". I told him, "we will see how where the text takes us." Well, here we are. And the text has taken us to where through Saul we see the effects of rebellion against God take us. What is Saul's main tactic in justifying his evil, the main threat he uses? It's propaganda. It's, as we would say "Fake News". Conspiracy theories.



**Verse 6** sets the scene. Saul is sitting under the shade of a tree, again with spear in hand, a sign of his futility that he takes comfort in his weapons. And his servants are convening around him. **Verse 7-8**, we find that the only ones left loyal to Saul here are Benjamites: his kinsmen. But what does he do? He accuses even those closest to him. He takes as fact what is in fact not true: that they have conspired against him with David. What, he says, is the reason? Perhaps he was bribed you, promised money and land and power? This is Saul's conspiracy theory: David has bought off his faithful kinsmen to his side with bribes of future glory.

Of course none of this is true, but Saul is too blind to see that. He has been deceived, the facts lie just as he wants them to lie. He has another fact: none of them have told him that Jonathan made a covenant with David! Notice the leap of logic: because they have not told me about how close Jonathan is to David, they must be bribed by David against me.

What a picture we have here of the character of Satan and his servants. He is the father of lies. What comes before the fall of man? A simple lie. A conspiracy: "did God really say?" A twisting of the facts. Genesis 3:1 says the serpent was "cunning", slithering into the garden to disguise his true intentions. And he disguises his less like truth. You can almost put yourself in the shoes of Saul's servants. They probably begin to question themselves: "are we the enemies here?"

The first step in seeing the futility of Satan is to understand his ploys. It's all lies. Author Jared Wilson recently wrote a book called *The Gospel According to Satan: Eight Lies about God that Sound Like Truth*. Why? Because the first step in understanding our enemy is understanding that even if it sounds like truth, all he can offer are lies, conspiracy, and fake news.

There are those who thrive in this atmosphere. This is Doeg, who comes up again in **verse 9-10**. Remember him? The one who spied out David? Apparently now he steps up to Saul and confirms Saul's conspiracy. The witch hunt has a new target: Ahimelech the priest. He is the one, Doeg says, who clearly has been helping David your enemy. I saw him give him provisions and even a sword.

But is Ahimelech guilty? It takes a very shaky and rushed trial of injustice to condemn him. **Verse 11-12**, Saul summons him, and all his family members, for his accusation. Notice Saul's wording in **verse 13**. What you did has allowed him to rise up and lie in wait against me, even now! Of course, David is the one hiding in a cave. Ahimilich gave him a few loaves of bread. But in this kangaroo court, Ahimlech stocked up David with mounds of provisions, so that even now David has amassed an army and is just waiting to strike.

Ahimelech is wise, and not fooled by the king's conspiracies. He has the facts straight. And so he does not deny that he helped David, but asks rhetorically in **verse 14-15**: we are talking about the same guy right? This is David, your most faithful servant. Helping him is helping you! I have no knowledge of this strange conspiracy.



**Verse 16** is very telling, isn't it? The king announces the verdict: "you shall surely die." In the garden, this was the warning God gave to Adam and Eve, the warning Satan had them question. Will you surely die if you eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil? Surely not. The same error of the serpent is the error of Saul here. Satan tried to convince Adam and Eve that he held the keys of life and death, not God. Saul believes that he too is the true arbiter of justice, that he holds the keys to life and death. "You are just as powerful as God." This is Satan's greatest lie, which Saul, the antichrist, has bought hook, line, and sinker.

And in the moment, it feels true, doesn't it? Saul has the power of the sword. Although his servants are not so foolish to cut down the priests of God, Doeg is willing. At Saul's bidding, he wields the power of death over the holy place and the anointed men. But don't believe the propaganda, friends. Satan may tempt you into forgetting the true power of God, but it's not true. Evil men may kill, they may wield earthly power under the command of Satan, little antichrists, but they do not hold the power of life and death. Jesus tells us in Matthew 10:28,

"Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

God alone has this power—and that, dear friends, should be comfort for us. We have a great enemy, no doubt. Adolph Hitler once said that "the correct use of propaganda is a true art."<sup>2</sup> Our enemy has mastered propaganda, and conspiracy is his weapon of choice. But the thing about conspiracy is that while it can lead to great evil and deception it lacks the one that is most necessary for real power: truth. In the end, all lies will be exposed. Satan knows this, and that is why his main goal is not to win you to his side. The main ploy of Satan is to confuse and distract and deceive you until it's too late to be on God's side.

But in the end, he has forgotten that God holds in his hand the one thing that he can never hold: time. See, if God is sovereign over eternity, that means that every action, even the most vilest and evil ones, do not slip from his hands. Every action of the world, even the ones taken by his enemies against his own people, are in the scope of God's providence. Providence is the great leash of the antichrist.

## **We know his End: The providence of God (18-20)**

In **verse 18**, Doeg commits great evil by the hand of Saul. Every priest before God is killed that day by his hand, mercilessly, without a fight. Not only that, he commits the entire priestly city of Nob to destruction, the very act Saul did not do against the Amalekites he no orders on his own people. Saul has become the accuser, the enemy, the slaughterer, of God's own people. No one seems safe from his rage and wrath. **Verse 20**, we find a flicker of hope. Abiathar escapes, into the keeping of the camp of David.

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<sup>2</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*



We look at such an evil and feel powerless. We ask the question: what is God doing? Is this an affront against his power? Does Satan have the upper hand here? These are our natural questions, but they reveal that we aren't looking close enough. Turn with me quickly back to **1 Samuel 2:31-33**.

Behold, the days are coming when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house. Then in distress you will look with envious eye on all the prosperity that shall be bestowed on Israel, and there shall not be an old man in your house forever. The only one of you whom I shall not cut off from my altar shall be spared to weep his eyes out to grieve his heart, and all the descendants of your house shall die by the sword of men.

This is God's promise to Eli because of the sin of him and his sons. The immediate fulfillment of this prophecy was at the death of Hophni and Phineas, those evil sons. But remember, their descendants remained. Eventually they moved their priestly order from Shiloh to Nob. There they grew in number, serving before the Lord. The evil of their forefathers had passed. But God had not forgotten this promise to Eli. The day was coming soon where his descendants would be cut off, and only one would survive.

The scene of 1 Samuel 22 is the fulfillment of that prophecy. Through the evil sword of Doeg, God is executing his providential justice, exactly how he said he would. John Piper defines God's providence in his new book as "God's purposeful sovereignty". It's God power over everyone and everything put to purpose.

God is not the author of the evil of 1 Samuel 22. That is ascribed to Saul, as we see in **verse 21**. God did not kill his own priests: that was the antichrist Saul, by the hand of Doeg the Edomite. God is not the author of evil, or is he to blame for evil. But church, hear me very carefully: even the surest plans of Satan and the vilest acts of earth do not escape his purposeful sovereignty. Every single action and event in all of history is bent with razor sharp precision towards the glorification of God's name. This is providence.

And if it upsets our sensibilities a bit, it's because it's meant to. We are meant to marvel at the mystery of God: that he would be so far more powerful than Satan that the most Satanic acts are pieces of his providential puzzle. It should lead us to worship to consider how God fulfills his own plans and prophecy through the hands of his own enemies! And it should give us comfort: the strong man Satan is bound, as he has always been, into the hands of God. He may be your tempter, and he may feel strong and potent to you as he weaves webs of lies and conspiracy, but the truth will always come out. And the truth is that all the attempt of our enemy to wrestle glory away from Almighty God are hilariously futile.

You do not have to succumb to his lies and his tricks. Providence is the lens of space/ It tells us: nothing escapes God's grasp: not even evil against him. And no greater place do we find the glory of this truth than the cross of Christ. Judas, another antitype and antichrist, did the unthinkable. He



succumbed to the lies of Satan to the point of betraying the very son of God and handing him over to death. At this moment, it seems as if Satan has won! He has dealt the blow, he has slaughtered the priests, his power and vengeance knows no match!

But what does providence show us? That the very moment Jesus is handed over by the plans of Satan, the devil got played. He is walking right into the plans of Gog, caught in the web of providence. His most vile act—betraying and crucifying the son of God—is the very act that God has been planning since before time began. The great and terrible enemy of God is not an enemy after all, but simply a pawn in Yahweh's service.

Providence is your great weapon in the fight against Satan. It says: "I know who you really are, You lies can't fool me. You are nothing but a tool in the hands of God." 1 Samuel 22 gives us this picture clear as crystal. Antichrist is scary, and the power he wields feels daunting, but ultimately it is futile. Amen and amen, Christ is the conquering king, who came to destroy the works of the devil.

## **We know his Enemy: The Safety of Messiah (22-23)**

Where does the jaw-dropping reality of God's providence over evil lead us. Like Abiathar, it leads us into the safety of God's anointed. In **verse 22**, David acknowledges his sorrow: he feels responsible for this great injustice. But David has a firm grasp on God's sovereignty. We know this because of the Psalm he pens when he hears of Doeg's evil actions. Psalm 55:1, "Why do you boast of evil, O mighty man? The steadfast love of God endures all the day." In other words: just wait Doeg, I know what's coming for you. The confidence of David, even in his sorrow, is in the providence of God over evil. The wickedness of man and the schemes and lies of Satan last for a day, but the steadfast love of God endures forever.

We close by meditating on David's words in **verses 23**.

**Stay With Me.** Jesus Christ, the true messiah, tells those who come to me by faith: stay with me. He does not say "you will surely die." He does not accuse unjustly. No, he calls in peace and says "In my father's house there are many rooms. I am going to prepare a place for you." Pull up a chair, there is room at the table for you.

**Do Not Be Afraid.** The evil one who haunts you day by day is not stronger than me. His hate is not stronger than my love. He can kill your body, but I hold the keys of life and death. I am the resurrection and the life, and I am coming back to judge and cast out Satan forever. Do not be afraid.

**I know what you feel.** If they persecuted me, they will persecute you. But this is good news, because it means that I can offer you exactly what you need. You can follow in me into victory, because I've been there myself. I was tempted in every way as you are, but I have overcome.



**You are safe here.** Nothing can harm you in my arms. You need not fear destruction, your future is bright. “The Prince of Darkness grim, We tremble not for him; His rage we can endure, For lo! his doom is sure, One little word shall fell him. The body they may kill: God’s truth abideth still, His Kingdom is forever.” Here is safety and rest, in union by the spirit with the Son of God, the true Christ. In this world you will have many troubles, take heart, he says, I have overcome the world.

