
“The Transfer of Power”

1 SAMUEL 16:14-23

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AT A GLANCE

In this powerful scene of transition, we witness a quiet yet profound “change of command” as the Spirit of the Lord departs from Saul and rushes upon David. Though still a shepherd boy, David is ushered into the king’s court by divine design, carrying bread, wine, and music that soothes a tormented king. This passage reveals the difference the Spirit makes—empowering a life of integrity, worship, and divine purpose, ultimately pointing us to Christ, our true Shepherd and King.

INTRODUCTION: A QUIET CHANGE OF COMMAND

In the Army units conduct what are called “change of command ceremonies.” At the pinnacle of the ceremony the unit’s guidon, a flag bearing the unit’s insignia, is passed from the keeper of the guidon, the First Sergeant or Command Sergeant Major, to the outgoing commander. The outgoing commander takes the guidon one last time in his hands and offers a brief word of gratitude to his enlisted counterpart. He then pivots and hands the guidon to his superior commander.

The superior commanding officer then hands it to the incoming commander with a charge to lead well. The new commander accepts the guidon, and with it the commensurate responsibility and authority. He then returns the guidon to the keeper, his new senior enlisted counterpart. And the transfer of power is complete.

The outgoing commander is officially relieved of his responsibility and the new is officially empowered to lead. The ceremony continues for some time in this situation, perhaps another 30-45 minutes. Both the outgoing and incoming commanders are present, but only one has authority.

Something of a change of command ceremony takes place in 1 Samuel 16. While it would be years before David would exercise his authority over Israel, the transfer of power happens while he was still a shepherd boy. The Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David in 16:13 and departed from Saul in 16:14. The rest of 1 Samuel is a tale of two men, one being led by the Spirit and the other attempting to lead without Him.

1 SAMUEL 16:14-23

¹⁴Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the LORD tormented him. ¹⁵And Saul's servants said to him, “Behold now, a harmful spirit from God is tormenting you. ¹⁶Let 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.” ¹⁷So Saul said to his servants, “Provide for me a man who can play well and bring him to me.” ¹⁸One 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.” ¹⁹Therefore 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.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.

THE SPIRIT DEPARTS AND A HARMFUL SPIRIT ARRIVES

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

The Hebrew term translated **harmful** has a wide range of meaning - from “misery” to “perverse.” Thus, it could mean “evil” spirit, but it seems preferable to read this in the sense of a spirit sent as judgement from the Lord.

What is clear is that Saul’s condition is no accident, nor is it merely a physical or medical condition. (Bergen) Rather this experience of Saul’s is in direct correlation to his disobedience to the Lord. Saul is a parable for us - life with the Lord, misery apart from Him.

IRONY AND PROVISION

Verses 15-17 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.”

It is ironic that Saul is being diagnosed by his servants. The king is powerless to understand his own faculties. His servants identify that help will come if they can find someone to play beautiful music.

There’s a word here that connects this story with the preceding. Let me briefly say, this is not necessarily the next story of David’s life chronologically. The author places this story here thematically. In other words, he wants us to see something significant – the a transfer of power from Saul to David. It all rides on who has the Spirit of the Lord; and with Him, His power.

The word that links these two sections is the word **provide**. If you recall from last week, the Hebrew word is ra’ah (raw) and is translated “see,” “appearance,” “look at,” and “provide” nine times in verses 1-13. In that passage it is the Lord who “sees” and “provides.”

In this passage Saul asks his servants to **seek out** and **provide**. Ironically, the subject of both provisions will be the same young man, David. He is the doubly provided king.

These ironies are not accidental. The author is presenting them for us to admire and enjoy and contemplate. What is the message if not that David has God on his side and nothing will keep the Lord from achieving His will. He will use Saul to bring his own replacement into his royal court.

Remember who the real star of this story is – the sovereign God. He is seen directing the affairs of the people, great and small, to achieve His purpose and plan.

Isn’t our God amazing! I echo Paul when I say, “*Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!...To him be glory forever. Amen.*” Romans 11:33, 36

DAVID'S DESCRIPTION: GOD IS WITH HIM

Verse 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.”

Consider how this young shepherd boy, who had been written off as insignificant in the previous section, is described:

A man of valor, a man of war – This is interesting because we’ve not yet seen David in combat. That story comes next. But recall, the author is not simply chronicling what happened. He’s writing a narrative to reveal something about God and man in the story of David’s life. We’ll come back to this in the application.

Prudent in speech – not only given to wisdom, but also discretion. He’s not going to gossip about the king and spread kingdom business where it shouldn’t be. He’s trustworthy.

A man of good presence – handsome. While not a qualifier, attractiveness does not disqualify a person from being a man or woman after God’s own heart.

The weight of the description is found in the final words, **and the Lord is with him**. This is where the reader needs to pause and go, this is why David has power and why Saul does not. This is the key to the rest of David’s success. This is where true power lies.

David Enters Saul’s Service

Verses 19-21a 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.^{21a} And David came to Saul and entered his service.

It should not be lost on us that Saul once again failed to seek the Lord and ask for His guidance. Nevertheless, the Lord’s will was done in spite of Saul. God’s chosen king has now **entered [Saul’s] service**. He is now inside the palace, and at the unwitting invitation of the king God rejected.

Verse 21b-22 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.”

The irony is thick here, knowing how things are going to turn between David and Saul. Saul has anxiety and is totally dependent upon a young boy of no standing. Saul is like a boat adrift at sea. He is tossed to and fro by every wave of emotion. Saul is a man without the Spirit of the Lord. Dangerous and unpredictable.

Verse 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.

For the **spirit to depart from him** suggests Saul was not possessed by a demon. If, however, this was a demon, it reveals the power of worship. Regardless, what is clear is the harmful spirit is no match for the one with the Spirit of the Lord.

APPLICATION:

THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

David was a shepherd boy with no claim to the throne—except that the Spirit of the **Lord was with him**. That’s the difference-maker! What the author is making obvious is that David’s power is from the Lord.

Even before he ever slayed the giant on the battlefield, David was called a **man of war**. While he was still a forgotten shepherd boy, he was called a **man of valor**. These are not *why* the Lord chose him. They are *because* the Lord chose him.

It's like Gideon. The Angel of the Lord called Gideon a man of valor while he was beating out wheat in a winepress, hiding from his enemies. (cf. Judges 6) The Lord called out in Gideon what He intended to work within him.

To have the Spirit of God is to enjoy His presence and His power. And everyone in Christ has the Spirit of God in them. The same Spirit that rushed upon David now lives in you according to Romans 8:11. The same power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in you bringing life to your mortal bodies. He is working in you what He wills for you!

He who has the Spirit of the Lord has the power of the Lord. Not to be wielded however they want, but to be used for His glory. They have the power to not gratify the desires of the flesh. (Galatians 5:16) They have the power to boldly witness for Jesus Christ. (Acts 1:8)

There is no limit to what God may do in and through you when you yield your life to the Spirit. *"Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."*
Ephesians 3:20-21

THE POWER OF INTEGRITY

When our life is reflected upon by others, when our deeds are disclosed, let it be said that we did what was right even when no one was looking...even when it would seem justifiable to do otherwise. David blessed the very man who would one day hate him and try to kill him.

The author establishes a theme here that will continue throughout 1 Samuel. David was no threat to Saul's reign. Rather he was a means of grace. As Christians, this is our calling in this world. We are salt, preserving the culture from an otherwise inevitable decay.

In the words of one commentator, we "keep the world from drowning in its own vomit, which, strangely, it craves." (*Looking at the Heart* - Dale Davis) We should not be surprised when our enemies hate us for it and seek our destruction.

David wrote countless Psalms in which he lamented his enemies' actions. Yet he also resounded his trust in the Lord to be his vindication. The margins of Psalms 40-55 in my bible at home are covered with my own handwriting as I've poured over them the last few years. They are like little memorials of God's faithfulness in the face of great trials. Oh, how the Lord has preserved me and been my vindication.

You can trust Him to be yours, too. You do not have to fight your own battles. You do not have to take matters into your own hands. You can let the Lord work it out. He will do it...in His time and in His way. I promise it will be far better than you getting your hands involved. This is the power of integrity: God will be our vindication.

"having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame." 1 Peter 3:16

THE POWER OF WORSHIP

Every time David played his lyre, Saul was refreshed and the harmful spirit fled. I hope it is not lost on you that this man of valor, this man of war, this future king, was perhaps the most talented worshipper we've ever seen. You've heard me say this before: worship is warfare!

We take the battle to the enemy in our heart, in our home, and in the house of the Lord. You and I get to raise our voices in praise and fix our eyes on the King of kings whenever and wherever we want to. We get to raise a banner for the Lord and join David in declaring:

“The Lord lives, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be the God of my salvation—the God who gave me vengeance and subdued peoples under me, who rescued me from my enemies...” Psalm 18:46-47

It is hard to be defeated by the enemy when we’re exalting Christ for His victories. This world is full of anxiety, confusion, and spiritual darkness. But the Spirit-filled worship of God’s people pushes back the darkness. So lift your voice. Fill your home with songs of praise. Let your heart become a sanctuary where Christ is exalted and the enemy is defeated!

The Spirit of the Lord changed everything for David—and it changes everything for us. When God’s Spirit fills us, we are empowered beyond our limits, marked by integrity that the world can’t deny, and armed with worship that drives out darkness. This is the kind of life God calls us to: Powerful. Integral. Worshipful.

CHRIST CONNECTION

David came in with a donkey, bringing wine, bread, and a young goat, possibly a sacrificial offering. Jesus came into Jerusalem riding on a donkey, where he would use bread and wine to symbolize His body broken and His blood poured out in a sacrificial offering for sin.

David refused to take matters into his own hands and put himself on the throne. Jesus, too, refused to take matters into His own hands to exalt Himself. He yielded to the Father’s will and laid down his life for us.

David was brought in from the sheep in the previous passage and is found with the sheep in this one. Jesus was raised to life by the power of the Spirit of the Lord and now He reigns as our high priest and shepherd-king.

True power is found where the Spirit of the Lord is. And the Spirit of the Lord is with every single person who trusts in Christ. If you want true spiritual power, you won’t find it anywhere but in Christ. Trust in Him today. Receive His salvation and let the Spirit of the Lord rush upon you.