

Playing the Fool

by Chuck Smith

The sermon explores the life of Saul, highlighting his potential, folly, and the lessons learned from his failures.

Duration: 42:59

Scripture: 1 Samuel 24:1

Topics: "Foolish"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the theme of playing the fool and wasting the talents and opportunities that God has given to us. He uses the story of Saul and David to illustrate this point. Saul, despite being a king with natural advantages, played the fool by pursuing David and seeking guidance from the spirit world. The speaker emphasizes that natural advantages and opportunities do not guarantee success, and that a person plays the fool when they try to hide from God's call, become prideful, intrude into areas where God has not called them, or make rash vows. The sermon serves as a reminder to not waste the potential and opportunities that God has given us.

Transcript

I'll read the first and the odd-numbered verses. Pastor Brian will lead the congregation in the even verses. Shall we stand as we read God's Word? This psalm was written by David when he was hiding from Saul there in the cave of En-Gedi, and God delivered him from the hand of Saul.

That's a part of our reading this week in 1 Samuel, and so as you read of David in that cave, this is the psalm that came out of that particular experience. Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me, for my soul trusteth in thee, yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge until these calamities be overpassed. I will cry unto God most high, unto God who performeth all things for me.

He shall send from heaven and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up. God shall send forth his mercy and his truth. My soul is among lions, and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men whose teeth are spears and arrows and their tongue a sharp sword.

Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let thy glory be above all the earth. They have prepared a net for my steps.

My soul is bowed down. They have digged a pit before me into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves. My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed.

I will sing and give praise. Awake up, my glory, awake, psaltery and harp. I myself will awake early.

I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people. I will sing unto thee among the nations. For thy mercy is great unto the heavens and thy truth unto the clouds.

Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens, and let thy glory be above all the earth. Let's pray. Father, as we come to you today, a needy people need your help, need your guidance, need your protection.

Lord, we pray that this day you will be with our president, with the leaders of this nation, and with our armed forces as, once again, Lord, we find ourselves in a battle for the preservation of those principles upon which our nation has been founded--that freedom to worship you, Lord. We realize, Lord, that the nation that we are engaged against is a nation that does not allow the freedom to worship you. Lord, there are those that are even on trial right now in that nation because they spoke to the children about Jesus Christ.

We thank you, Lord, that we do have freedom here. And as, once again, we're called upon to defend that freedom, to ensure the right of each man to worship God as he sees fit. Lord, we ask that you would just be with our troops.

Give them supernatural wisdom, strength, courage. Lord, with our leadership, give them great courage, Lord. May they not fold under the pressures of the liberal elements.

Lord, may they stand and do that which is right and honorable before you. And so, Lord, bless now, we pray, as we in the safety and the security of this sanctuary worship you and study your word. Open our hearts to the understanding of your truth.

In Jesus' name we pray, amen. You may be seated. Our scripture reading this week was in 1 Samuel, chapters 24 through 26.

And tonight we will be studying these chapters. And so we encourage you to read them over. Join with us this evening at seven o'clock for our evening Bible study.

This morning we'd like to draw your attention to the 26th chapter. And we have recorded here Saul's pursuit of David. And David with his men are watching Saul as he is pursuing David to kill him.

They watch him as he beds down for the night. And David said to the men, which one of you would go with me down to Saul's camp this evening? A very daring venture. Abishai said, I'll go with you.

So they came down to where Saul and his men were sleeping. And Abishai said, look at that, David. God's delivered your enemy into your hand.

I'll take his spear that's right there beside him. I'll thrust him through. I promise I'll get him right in the heart the first time.

I won't have to do it twice. David said, no. He's been anointed by God.

You don't touch him. But David took his spear and took his cruise of water. And then he escaped to a safe distance while Saul and all of his men were sleeping soundly.

In the breaking of day from a safe distance, David began to call. He called Abner, who was the bodyguard of Saul. And he said, Abner.

And he said, who are you that cries to the king? David said, are you not a valiant man? Who is like you in all of Israel? Wherefore have you not kept your Lord, the king? For there came one of the people to destroy the king, thy Lord. This thing is not good that you have done. As the Lord liveth, you ought to die because you have not kept your master, the Lord's anointed.

And now look where the king's spear is and the cruise of water that was at his bolster. And Saul knew David's voice. And he said, is this thy voice, my son David? David said, it is my voice, my Lord, O king.

And he said, why does my Lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? Or what evil is in my hand? Now, therefore, I pray thee, let my Lord, the king, hear the words of his servant. If the Lord has stirred you up against me, let him accept an offering. But if they be the children of men, cursed are they before the Lord, for they have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, go and serve other gods.

Now, therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth before the face of the Lord, for the king of Israel has come out to seek a flee, as one doth hunt for a partridge in the mountains. And then said Saul, I have sinned. Return my son David, for I will do no harm to you, because my soul was precious in your eyes this day.

Behold, I have played the fool, and I have erred exceedingly. There in just a few brief words, you have Saul uttering his autobiography. I have played the fool and erred exceedingly.

This is the story of the man's life. As we look at Saul in the beginning, we see that he is a man with tremendous potential. He is a man that has been given marvelous opportunities by God.

And yet, in spite of the potential and the opportunities, as he comes to the end of his life, looking back over his life, he has to confess, I've played the fool and erred exceedingly. The tragedy is that this is the autobiography of so many thousands of people. Perhaps some of you today, in looking over your life, can see the folly.

There are people who have tremendous potential, gifted people, but they get caught up in drugs. They play the fool, and all of the potential, all of the opportunities have been wasted, and they end up as prisoners to the drugs. There are those who have the potential and capacities of greatness, but they get caught up in alcoholism, and it brings them to the gutter.

I've played the fool. I've erred exceedingly. It is wrong to think that a man does not know the truth about himself, though we spend most of our time trying to hide that truth from others.

We live behind a facade. We want people to think that we are better than we really are, and so often we'll put a smile on our face and just a spring to our gate to make people think, oh, he's really got it made, to make them jealous of us. But down deep inside, we know the emptiness, and we know the failure.

We know the truth about ourselves, but oftentimes when caught in an unguarded moment, we utter the truth that we know. Here is Saul. He's been in a deep sleep.

He's been pursuing David. He's tired. And suddenly he is awakened out of that sleep, a voice that is familiar.

It's calling to him from a distance. Is that you, my son David? And he looks, and there in the distance is David holding his spear, holding his cruise of water. And he is taunting the bodyguard, saying to him, you're a valiant man, but you ought to be put to death.

You haven't kept your charge. It's up to you to protect the king. And you failed.

He could have been assassinated. Caught in this unguarded moment, still sleepy. It comes out.

I've played the fool. I've erred exceedingly. Let's look at this man who made this confession.

First of all, we are introduced to him in chapter nine, and we've been studying Saul for many weeks now as we've been going through 1 Samuel. And we were introduced to him in chapter nine, where we are told that he was a choice young man and goodly. Goodly is an old English word for handsome.

He was a choice young man and handsome. In fact, we are told that there was not a man in Israel more handsome than Saul. We are also told that he was big, that he was head and shoulders above everybody else.

You could always find him in a crowd because he would be standing head and shoulders above the others. Big, strong, handsome. Natural advantages.

You say, well, I don't know. Bigness and good looks isn't everything. That's true.

You could be a big, strong, handsome idiot, and your mind is surely more important than your physical prowess. He came from a good home. When we are first introduced to him, he is out looking for his father's donkeys that have strayed.

But finally he turns to the servant that is with him and he said, you know, I better get home. My dad's not going to be worried about the donkeys, he's going to be worried about me. It's a good home where a child, when he doesn't come home on time, realizes that his parents are going to be worried.

He has that kind of security that they love me, they're concerned about me, they're going to be worried if I'm not home on time. If you've come from a good home, then put that near the top of your list of blessings. What a blessing it is to grow up in a home where there is that security from a loving environment.

But also he was a humble man. Now, he finally came to the prophet Samuel to seek direction and guidance. And when Samuel met him, he said to him, you are the man who all of Israel is desiring.

Saul said, what are you talking about? All Israel is desiring me? I come from the tribe of Benjamin. We're the least tribe in Israel. And my father's house is the least family in that tribe.

There's sort of a beautiful humility there. But Samuel went on to tell him that God had chosen him to be the first king over Israel. Now, later on, when he met his uncle, and his uncle said, you actually got to meet the prophet Samuel.

What did he say to you? And Saul said, well, he told me that the donkeys had come back and dad was worried about me. But he didn't mention anything about Samuel saying, you're going to be the king over Israel. He was a humble man.

And we see that many opportunities came to him. First of all, the opportunity to be the first king over the nation of Israel. Now, the people had been a theocracy, but they had come to Samuel and they demanded that Samuel appoint them a king, that they might be like other nations.

It was a step down for Israel, but God chose the finest to be their first king. He had the opportunity of so ruling over the people, that the people would realize that God still rules. That they could have that confidence that God still rules over the nation.

The opportunity to show the people that God ruled. He was filled with the Holy Spirit. The prophet Samuel said, you're going to meet a company of prophets.

When you do, you'll join with them. You'll be filled with the Spirit. You'll be turned into another man.

And so it happened on his way home. And then, and we spoke on this a few Sundays ago, there went with him a company of men whose hearts God had touched. And we spoke about the tremendous potential of getting together with a company of men whose hearts have been touched by God.

One thing I really love about these conventions in Anaheim, at the convention center there, when the men gather, what an exciting electric moment it is to be with a bunch of men filling up that convention center whose hearts have been touched by God. What great potential. And yet this is the man who at the end of the road, looking back over his life, said, I've played the fool.

What are the manifestations of his folly? Well, the first one came quite early. Samuel had called the nation together that he might present to them their king. And so all of the nation gathered before Samuel and Samuel got up to speak to them.

He warned them of their failure to let God rule over in their demand for a king. And he's going to start taxing you and these things are going to happen. But he said, because you've insisted, God has set over you a king and I want to present to you your king.

But Saul wasn't there. And Samuel said, Lord, what's going on? I mean, did I make a mistake here? And the Lord said, oh, he's over hiding in the luggage. And so they went over and they led Saul out and the people began to cry, God saved the king.

God saved the king. You say, is that a sign of folly? I thought you told us that he was a very humble man. Isn't this just a further indication of the man's humility? When God has called you to serve and anointed you to serve, for you to try to hide from the call of God is not humility.

That's folly. The first manifestation of his folly. After two years of reigning as king, pride began to set in.

He had formed a standing army in Israel, 3,000 men. He took charge of 2,000. His son, Jonathan, was over 8,000.

And this is how the story goes. And Jonathan and his men smote the Philistines with a great slaughter. And Saul blew the trumpet in Israel.

So Israel heard that Saul had smitten the Philistines. Jonathan doing the fighting, Saul taking the bows. And as he would come to the villages, the ladies would come out with their tambourines and their dances.

And they would sing, Saul has killed his thousands. And that began to go to his head. He began to be lifted up in pride.

That ugly manifestation of pride began after his second year. Further manifestations of his folly. We read that the Philistines were invading the land.

And so Samuel said, gather the people together at Gilgal. And I will come and we will offer a sacrifice to the Lord and seek God's help and guidance in the battle against the Philistines. And so Saul had gathered with the people at Gilgal.

And Samuel did not show up at the appointed time. So Saul said, bring forth the sacrifice. And Saul offered the sacrifice to the Lord.

And as the offering was ending, Samuel came. And he said, Saul, what have you done? And Saul said, well, because the Philistines are setting up in battle, the people were fearful. So I forced myself and offered the sacrifice.

And Samuel said unto him, you have done foolishly. You've not kept the commandment of the Lord. You see, the manifestation of his folly was intruding into the area where he was not called.

God called him to be the king, but he was not called to be a priest and sacrifices were to be offered only by the priest and thus intruding into an area not called by God, a manifestation of his folly. Again, they were in battle against the Philistines. And the Philistines had come with such a huge army that it looked like it would be totally impossible to stand against them.

And most of Saul's army deserted and fled to the other side of the Jordan River. Those that remained were hiding in caves, fearful of the Philistines. And Jonathan, the son of Saul, got an interesting thought.

He thought, you know, if God wants to deliver the Philistines to Israel today, he doesn't need the army that for the most part had fled. All God needs is one man. Now that sounds wild, but if you think out logically, it's right.

And God is so great. He doesn't need a whole army. He can do it through just one man.

I wonder if God wants to deliver the Philistines. So he said to his armor bearer, you know, got this crazy thought. If God wants to deliver the Philistines to Israel today, he doesn't need the whole army.

All he needs is one man. Let's go over and see if God wants to deliver them today. And so he began this crazy venture in pain.

And as they were walking towards the camp of the Philistines, Jonathan said, well, we want to make sure the Lord's in this. So when the sentries see us, if they say, hey, you guys, what are you doing? Come up here. We'll teach you a lesson.

Then we'll know that God wants to deliver them to us. If they say, hey, you guys, what are you doing? Wait there. We'll come down and meet you.

Then we'll know that God doesn't want to deliver them. So as the sentries spotted Jonathan and his armor bearer, they said, hey, what are you guys doing? Come on up here. We'll teach you a thing or two.

Jonathan said, you're that man let's go. And they went on up against the Philistine forces, just the two of them. And they began to smite them.

And the Philistines began to fall back. And over on the other side, Saul woke up rubbing his eyes. He looked over to the camp of the Philistines.

And he saw the Philistines just falling back and two guys in the middle wailing away. He said, number quickly, who's missing? And they said, it's Jonathan and his armor bearer. And then Saul made this foolish vow.

Saul then said, cursed be the man who eats any food this day until I be avenged of my enemies. Notice I, my, the pride of this guy is developing. It turned into a rout.

The Philistines were fleeing and the men came out of their caves and dens and began to pursue after the Philistines. And toward afternoon, as Jonathan was pursuing the Philistines running through the forest, he saw a beehive. He stuck his spear into it and he began to eat the honey.

And suddenly he was refreshed. He revived and he continued the pursuit after the Philistines. But somebody said, don't you know that your dad put a curse on anybody that would eat anything today until he was fully avenged of his enemies? And Jonathan said, my father has troubled the land.

How much better it would have been if the people could have eaten the spoil. We would have had a much greater victory. Now that evening, as Saul and his troops were sort of gathered together, Saul was wondering if they could, should continue the pursuit through the night.

And he sought to inquire of the Lord and there was no response. And so he figured someone must have broken my vow. And so he said to the people, someone broke my vow.

Let's cast lots, you fellows and Jonathan, I on this side, whoever broke the vow will be killed. And so the lot fell on Saul and Jonathan. And Saul said to Jonathan, tell me what did you do? And he said, well, dad, I wasn't here when you made that vow.

And as I was going through the woods, I saw this beehive and I put my spear in it and I ate some honey and I was revived. And dad, it was, it was not a right kind of a thing to do. Saul said, put him to death.

And the men answered, God forbid, we're not going to touch that fellow. He has fought with God today and God has given great victories. And here is Saul ready to put to death his own son.

The folly of the man. But then we find also that Samuel came and said, God wants you to go down and utterly wipe out the Amalekites. And we also studied this.

He partially destroyed them, but he brought back the finest of the cattle, the finest of the sheep, the king himself. And when the prophet Samuel came out to meet him, Saul said to the prophet, blessings from God be upon you. I have performed the commandment of the Lord.

Big lie. Samuel said, if you've performed the commandment of the Lord, how come I hear the cattle and the sheep? And Saul said, well, the people began to fall on the spoil. So I thought I'll bring it back.

The finest of the cattle and the sheep that we might offer them as a sacrifice unto the Lord. Samuel rebuked him and said, to obey is better than to sacrifice. To hearken to God is better than the fat of rams.

And because you have rejected God from ruling over you, God has rejected you from ruling over the people. His disobedience to the command of God. And now even a further manifestation of his folly found in our text today, his turning against his godly associates.

There was probably not a more devoted man to God and to Saul than David. David admired Saul. He was a close godly man.

He was one of those men whose heart had been touched by God. And now we find him through jealousy, turning against David, pursuing him over the mountains like a partridge, wanting to slay him. Turning against your godly friends is a sign of folly.

The final manifestation of his folly we'll get in our study next week, in our readings next week, where he was again in battle against the Philistines. They were up near Mount Gilboa, the plains of Ezralan. He is seeking guidance from the Lord, but the Lord has quit speaking to Saul.

And so he said to his men, is there a witch around here that I can inquire of? And they said, well, you know, you've put the witches to death, but I understand there is one over in Endor. So Saul came over to Endor, and he went to this woman with a familiar spirit, and he said, I want you to bring back the person that I tell you about. I want to speak to him.

She said, you know how Saul has put to death all of the witches. He said, don't worry, I'll see that you're protected. And so she said, well, who do you want? He said, I want to talk to Samuel.

And so when Samuel appeared, she screamed. She said, you're Saul. He said, cool it, I'm not going to hurt you.

And Samuel then rebuked Saul, but seeking guidance from that spirit world manifestation of folly. What does the story teach us? First of all, that natural advantages do not guarantee success. You can be greatly talented, greatly gifted, and still play the fool and waste those talents that God has given to you.

We see that over and over again. It teaches us that opportunities do not crown a man. After God has given to you many wonderful opportunities, it's still possible for you to be a fool.

It teaches us that a man plays the fool when he tries to hide from the call of God. He plays the fool when he becomes lifted up with pride. He plays the fool when he intrudes into areas where God has not called him.

A man plays the fool when he makes rash vows. A man plays the fool when he turns against his godly friends. He plays the fool when he seeks counsel from the spirit world.

When he looks for guidance in the position of the stars, or some fortune teller, or some psychic. These were all manifestations of Saul's folly. But what was the heart of the folly? What was underneath it all? What was the true folly of the man? It's found in the words of Samuel.

When he did not obey the command of God to utterly wipe out the Amalekites, Samuel said to him, You have refused to let God rule over you. Listen to that carefully. You have refused to let God rule over you.

That was the basic folly of the man. The rest all sprang from that one truth. You have refused to let God rule over you.

Any man who refuses, any woman who refuses to let God rule over their life is playing the fool. And one day, when you get to the end of the road and you look back over your life, like Saul in uttering an autobiography, looking at your life, you'll have to confess, I've played the fool and erred exceedingly. A man is a fool if he thinks that he knows better what's good for him than God.

When you think you can improve on God's plan, for your life, when you choose to be the master of your fate, the captain of your own destiny, you're playing the fool. God's ways are the best. They are the wisest.

You can't improve on what God wants for you. And thus, to submit yourself fully to be controlled and guided by God is the wisest thing any man can do. A man is a fool who turns against the will of God.

Any man who surrenders his life fully to the will of God will never end his life saying, I've played the fool and erred exceedingly. Does God rule your life today? If not, one day you'll probably find yourself in an unguarded moment saying, I've been such a fool. Never, never will you say that if you have surrendered your life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Father, let your Holy Spirit drive home the lesson this day. And Lord, we pray that we might indeed surrender to you fully, completely.

That you might take control over our lives, over our destiny. And that we Lord would be obedient and let you rule over us. In Jesus name.

Amen. Shall we stand? One basic question I want you to ask yourself and be as honest in the answer as possible. Does God rule over your life today? Or are you ruling over your life today? Big difference.

The difference between being a wise man and a fool. Letting God rule over your life or you saying, well, I did it my way. Foolish.

The pastors are down here at the front. And if God has been speaking to your heart and showing you that you have been seeing manifestations of folly in your life. Maybe you've turned away from your godly friends.

Maybe pride has sort of taken over. Maybe you've been trying to hide from the call of God or maybe you've been intruding in areas where you don't belong. Manifestations of that folly.

But the heart of it is you haven't let God rule over your life. It's not too late. You can this day begin to live a life that is worthwhile.

A life that will count for eternity. By surrendering your life fully and completely to Jesus Christ. To do his will.

The pastors are down here at the front to pray for you that you might experience experience what it is to surrender your life fully unto the Lord. As soon as we're dismissed, we would encourage that you make your way forward. Meet with them down here at the front.

May this be the banner day of your life. The day that you'll look back to in the future and say, what a wise thing I did when I turned my life over to Jesus Christ to let him rule in my life. It's your choice.

May God guide you in making the right choice. May his face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace.

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