

1 Samuel 31 — The King Is Dead

November 27, 2022

Good morning! My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. It is great to have you. I hope you could enjoy a great Thanksgiving and be with your family. Thanksgiving is a time for us to remember the many ways God has been good. Taking time to reflect on God's goodness is something we want to do at CrossWinds. One of the ways God was especially good to us this year was in our search for a permanent home for our Spencer Campus. As many of you know, at the end of last year, we purchased the old Compass Pointe building on the north side of the north Spencer mall for our new Spencer Campus home.

We purchased the building for \$300,000 cash and began a capital campaign project for building renovations. We projected our costs at \$640,000. You gave generously, and this summer we met that goal. Then inflation kicked in, and many of the costs in the project doubled, and some tripled. We raised the campaign goal to \$800,000. This past week, the funds received for the capital campaign met, then exceeded that goal. We now have \$825,528 given to our capital campaign fund in the last 11 months. We want to thank God for providing those funds and for the generosity of God's people to the mission of CrossWinds Church, which is reaching people with Jesus in the Spencer and Spirit Lake communities.

In other good news, the electricians continue working hard at the new Spencer Campus. The stage build is also getting closer to completion as the design crew from Minneapolis was in working on the project this week. Our goal

was to be in the new facility on Christmas Eve. I don't think we will make it, but we are close. That is just another reason to give thanks.

If you can help with some basic construction or electrical, talk to me or Pastor Shane after the service. We will take any assistance we can get.

I also want to remind you that tonight, for about 30 minutes, we will have a fun Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony for the 35-foot-tall tree by the road. We will sing a few Christmas songs, plug in the tree, and take a few moments to pray about reaching our communities with Jesus during the Christmas season. We will also have some snacks at the coffee bar for everyone to enjoy after the tree lighting.

This morning, we will finish the book of 1 Samuel. Next week, we will begin our Christmas Series, "Good News Of Great Joy."

As we turn our thoughts to the Bible, I wonder how many of us watched Queen Elizabeth's Funeral. She died September 8 of this year at the age of 96. She was the longest-reigning British Monarch. When her body was laid at Westminster Abby for viewing, an estimated 250,000 people visited her casket from September 14 to 19. At her funeral, there were representatives from 168 countries in attendance. Her funeral was the most watched television broadcast in England for the twenty-first century.

Even though I am not someone who follows the royal monarchy, the size of Queen Elizabeth's funeral reminded me that it is a big deal when a queen dies. This morning, as we turn to 1 Samuel 31, in this chapter, King Saul dies. His death was a big deal. It changed everything in Israel.

Background

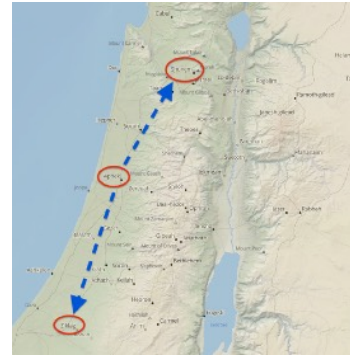
If you have been with us for earlier parts of our study in 1 Samuel, King Saul's death does not come as a complete surprise. His obituary was given in 1 Samuel 31. It was after Saul's direct disobedience of God's words by failing to wipe out the Amalekites that God rejected him as king and his reign began a downward spiral. After Saul's obituary in 1 Samuel 31, it was 16 chapters of Saul repeatedly demonstrating his unfitness to serve as king. In those chapters, he was driven by fear and jealousy; he murdered the priesthood and even turned to a witch for guidance. When the king of God's people is getting guidance for his life from a witch, you have hit a new low.

For those who are new, you also need to know the final chapters of 1 Samuel go back and forth between the story of David and the story of King Saul. What brought us to this point was David, in desperation to get away from King Saul who was always trying to murder him, defected to the enemy. He hid among the Philistines. He pretended to be one of the Philistines. This worked well for David and finally gave him some rest.

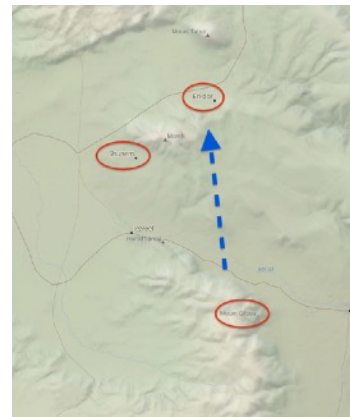
The problem was that when the Philistines decided to go to war against Israel, Achish, the Philistine king of the city of Gath, forcibly enlisted David and his men into the army. It looked like David would be forced to fight against King Saul. He would put his hand out against the Lord's anointed, which was the one thing he had refused to do. Last week, we saw how God came to his rescue. In preparation for the battle, the Philistine forces, led by the five Kings of the five leading Philistine cities, assembled at Aphek to review the troops. When the other Philistine Lords saw David and his men as part of Achish's soldiers, they

kicked David and his men out of the army. They didn't like the idea of David and his Israelite men in the rear of their army while they fought Saul and the Israelite men in the front of the army.

After being kicked out of the army, David and his men headed south to Ziklag, which was their home while in the land of the Philistines. The Philistine army headed north to Shunem for the battle. The Philistines came to Shunem on the north side of the Jezreel Valley. That was when Saul, afraid of the future, visited a witch at Endor.



Meanwhile, David and his men reach Ziklag in the south to find their city burned to the ground and all the women and children taken as slaves. That was when David hit his low point. This was when David finally repented of running from the Lord and turns back to the Lord. God was so gracious. He didn't make David sit in the penalty box for three years. God immediately restored him and used him to destroy almost all the Amalekite raiders and to save the women and children.



While David and his men were fighting the Amalekites in the south, at the same time, Saul and his men were fighting the Philistines in the north. They were one hundred miles apart from one another.

As we look at 1 Samuel 31, which tells us about Saul's battle with the Philistines and his death in this battle, I think the best heading for the chapter is, "What does King Saul teach us about death?" A lot of people are about to die and there is a lot from that we can learn.

1. A successful life is not necessarily long, but it is faithful.

Now the Philistines were fighting against Israel, and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. 1 Samuel 31:1 (ESV)

This verse begins with some rather unusual Hebrew grammar. The grammar tells us that what happens here happened simultaneously with the closing scenes of the last chapter. In a movie, we might say, "Meanwhile, what was happening in Shunem...." As the camera zooms in on the battle between Saul and the Philistines, the scene does not look good. The Israelite soldiers were getting slaughtered.



As we mentioned in previous weeks, if the battle began in the Jezreel valley between Shunem and Mount Gilboa, the Philistines had a major advantage. In 1 Samuel 13:5, at the battle of Michmash, the Philistines came with 30,000 chariots. At that time, we learned that the Philistines knew how to forge metal and they kept that technology from the Israelites. The Philistines fought with iron chariots, swords, and body armor, while the Israelites' primary weapons were sticks and stones. Iron chariots, especially on the flat ground of the valley between these two mountains, were extremely effective. They were like tanks. They mowed over the Israelites who were powerless against them.

At this point, the Israelites were in full retreat. They were retreating up Mount Gilboa. Chariots could not go uphill and across the rocky mountain hillside. The next verse zooms in even closer giving us a glimpse of the fighting taking place on the side of the mountain.

And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons,... 1 Samuel 31:2a (ESV)

Among the soldiers scrambling up the hillside to escape the chariots was a small group that the Philistines had a special interest in finding. It was King Saul and his sons. It says the Philistines overtook them, focused on them, and took out the soldiers in front of them so they could get to Saul and his sons. The Philistines were no dummies. They were just like the Ukrainians fighting the Russians. Just as the Ukrainians try to kill Russian generals because they are the most valuable targets in the war, the Philistines were after King Saul and his sons. They were the most valuable targets in this war.

...and the Philistines struck down Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua, the sons of Saul. 1 Samuel 31:2b (ESV)

Saul had more than three sons. One son named Ishvi either was not in this battle or escaped. We will meet him in 2 Samuel, where he is called by his full name, Ish-Bosheth. The other three sons of King Saul die in front of him. It would be terrible to watch all three of your sons die in front of you in battle. All three of Saul's sons fought to the death defending their father. None of them ran away from their father. They protected him with their life. While the death of these men is tragic, it is also heroic. Today, how many children would be willing to die for their parents? Today, how many children would be willing to die defending a messed-up father like King Saul?

In this list, the son with whom we have become most familiar is Jonathan, Saul's oldest son. His death appears to be the greatest tragedy. We know Jonathan was a man of exemplary character. He was the first man to recognize that David would be the next king. He was a loyal and faithful friend to David. Even though Jonathan was next in line to be king, he accepted without jealousy that God had decided David would be the next king instead of himself. Most of us would have been jealous if we were in Jonathan's position.

God also used Jonathan to encourage David in the Lord when David was in the dumps in the Judean Wilderness. You know Jonathan was an amazing man if God used him to encourage David. Jonathan also courageously took David's side in the war between Saul and David. Jonathan almost lost his life when his father tried to pin him to the wall with a spear because he stood up for David. Jonathan was also the hero of the battle of Michmash. Jonathan and his armor bearer single-handedly took on the Philistines trusting God to give them victory while Saul and the rest of the army hid. While Saul was so messed up that twice he tried to kill Jonathan, his own son. Jonathan was the exact opposite of his father. He was an extremely courageous and godly man.

It really struck me how Jonathan, Abinidab, and Malchi-Shua all defended their very flawed father to death. They should have saved their own lives. They should have stepped aside and let the Philistines through to kill their dad, but that is not what they did. They honored and protected their flawed father with their lives. As such, they died as heroes.

It would have been a different legacy if they had stepped aside and let the Philistines through to kill their dad and give him the suffering he deserved.

The key word for Jonathan, and probably the other two brothers, was faithfulness, faithfulness to their father to the end.

Isn't that what defines a successful life, faithfulness to the end? Today, we think a successful life is a big retirement account, vacationing in Florida for the winter, and a yacht. All those things may be true about you, but that doesn't mean your life was a success. Success is faithfulness to the end, even when it is hard, even when the person doesn't feel like they deserve it. A successful life is someone who married their spouse for better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health. Then their spouse gets sick, and they stay by their side to the end of their life. That was not an easy end of life, but it was a successful end of life because they were faithful to the end.

Now we zoom in on Saul.

The battle pressed hard against Saul,... 1 Samuel 31:3a (ESV)

After the Philistines killed Saul's sons, everyone focused on Saul.

...and the archers found him,... 1 Samuel 31:3b (ESV)

The Philistine chariots could not make it up Mount Gilboa, but the archers could shoot up the slopes. Arrows were especially effective against soldiers that were running up the slopes and had their backs exposed. At this point, Saul faced a hailstorm of razor-sharp point reigning on him.

...and he was badly wounded by the archers. 1 Samuel 31:3c (ESV)

The mental picture we have is Saul with arrows stuck in him from all sides. He looked like a porcupine. He was a tortured man walking around, unable to lie

down because that would push arrows further into his body. Walking only made things worse. We know Saul was one of the few Israelites with body armor. That armor protected his vital organs. The arrows stuck in him had pierced the gaps in his armor. With his vital organ intact but pierced with arrows in every exposed part of his flesh, he knew it was only a matter of time.

2. Suicide is not a god-honoring way to die.

Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and mistreat me."... 1 Samuel 31:4 (ESV)

Saul, having seen his son's death, and riddled with arrows in the body, knew his death was inevitable. He feared not being completely dead when the Philistines made it up the hill. He was afraid they would keep him alive to torture him and prolong his death. That is not an unreasonable fear. The Philistines kept Samson alive to torment him after they gouged out his eyes in Judges 16.

So King Saul asked his armor-bearer to take his sword and kill him. Just get my death over with.

...But his armor-bearer would not, for he feared greatly. Therefore Saul took his own sword and fell upon it. 1 Samuel 31:4 (ESV)

Saul's armor-bearer would have been a young man. This young man was like David. He refused to put his hand out against the Lord's anointed. Not getting the help Saul wanted to assist him in suicide, he fell on his sword hoping to kill himself. When we get to 2 Samuel, it appears Saul's attempt at suicide was not initially effective. He requested help a second time from another person to put him out of his misery. This brings us to a topic we rarely talk about in church but we find ourselves talking about it this morning. It is the topic of suicide.

Suicide is not an act of bravery. It is an act of cowardice. In Saul's case, his attempt to take his own life was the culmination of a godless life.

I recognize there are the mentally ill and those who suffer from severe biological depression who take their own life. I recognize that and have compassion on them, but Saul's suicide was not that way. It was a calculated decision. From a worldly perspective, some may think it was understandable. He knew he did not have long to live. He was afraid of being tortured.

But this was still an act of rebellion against God. The man who didn't want to submit to God and wanted to be in charge of his life also did not want to submit to God in his death. He wanted to be in charge of that moment too.

What is revealing is that as Saul dies, no place do we see Saul calling out to God for mercy and help in his final hours. All he cares about is dying his way, in his timing.

There are six suicides mentioned in the Bible. This one is by King Saul. There is also King Saul's armor bearer in this chapter. Abimelech killed himself after he was injured in Judges 9, Ahithophel hung himself in 2 Samuel 17, Zimri burned a house down around him in 1 Kings 16, and Judas in Matthew 27. (Some also consider Samson a suicide.) In none of these does the Bible directly evaluate the deed, but they all are acts of deeply troubled individuals. These suicides are the end of troubled lives, not exemplary ones.

Suicide is also murder. The Bible tells us we are not to murder other people. We are also not to murder ourselves. Would you murder someone's brother, sister, mother, or father? Many people who murder themselves are

murdering the father of someone, the brother of someone, or the sister of someone.

And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.” Genesis 9:5–6 (ESV)

“You shall not murder. Exodus 20:13 (ESV)

God is the only one with the right to decide the time of our birth. He is also the only one with the right to decide the time of our death.

God is the giver of life, and He is the only one with the right to take it away.

Sometimes people consider ending their life when they are filled with despair. Solomon reached the point where he said he “hated life” in Ecclesiastes 2:17. Elijah was fearful and depressed and wanted to die in 1 Kings 19:4. Jonah was angry at God and wanted to die in Jonah 4:8. Even the apostle Paul talked about despairing of life itself in 2 Corinthians 1:8. Job lost everything, even his health. His wife told him to curse God and die.

I want us to notice that none of those people committed suicide. Instead, it was when they were at the bottom of life that God taught them something they needed to learn about life. When Solomon despaired of life is when he learned that the duty of all mankind is to fear God and keep his commandments. When Elijah despaired of life is when he was comforted by an angel. It was great to be comforted by an angel, but Elijah had to be filled with despair for that to happen. Jonah was taught by God about his selfishness and lack of care for others when he despaired of life. Paul, in his despair, learned not to rely on himself but on God, who raises the dead. Job had God completely turn his life around. He never

saw that coming. It is a good thing he didn't commit suicide when his wife told him to curse God and die.

This brings us to another topic, which is assisted suicide. Saul asked his armor-bearer to kill him because he felt his end was near. His armor-bearer refused to kill him. Today, many people are not as adorable. Physician-assisted suicide is now legal in 10 states. In April of this year, the governor of Vermont signed a bill modifying the state's law, giving increased access to end-of-life medicine from tele-doctors. If you want to die, just call this number, and the doctor will give you a life-ending prescription. In April of 2021, New Mexico made it legal for doctors to prescribe life-ending medication if they think a person has less than six months to live.

I am not talking about a person that is on life support, and the plug is pulled from the life support machine, and they pass away of natural causes. Physician-assisted suicide is when people have cancer, and they are still relatively healthy, but they don't know how long they have to live, and they decide to have a physician help them take their life anyway. That is murder. Saul's armor-bearer refused to participate in helping the king take his own life. Remember that God determined both the day of our birth and our death. It is not for us to take ourselves out of life prematurely.

We won't have a chance to get into it this morning, but when we get to 2 Samuel, we will find that Saul falling on his sword was not enough to immediately end his life. His life still lingered. He saw an Amalekite running past him. He

asked the Amalekite to kill him, and the Amalekite took his life. Look how David reacts to this assisted suicide. First we begin with the words of the Amalekite.

And he said to me, 'Stand beside me and kill me, for anguish has seized me, and yet my life still lingers.' So I stood beside him and killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen... 2 Samuel 1:9–10 (ESV)

When David heard this, he killed the Amalekite for taking the king's life.

Then David called one of the young men and said, "Go, execute him." And he struck him down so that he died. And David said to him, "Your blood be on your head, for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the Lord's anointed.'" 2 Samuel 1:15–16 (ESV)

David didn't see this assisted suicide as compassionate. He saw it as murder. In David's mind, it didn't matter if the king was shot full of arrows and had fallen on his sword. His life was sacred and should be respected. Nobody had a right to help him take it, even as he was dying. This is very instructive for us as we face end-of-life situations.

When my mother was dying of cancer, she was in a nursing home. She wasn't really happy about being in a nursing home instead of her own home. I remember talking to her about it, saying, "Mom, I think the reason God has you in this nursing home is that some of the nurses caring for you need to hear about Jesus. Maybe God has you here to tell them about Jesus before you go home to meet Jesus." There was my mom, trying to build relationships with the nurses telling them about Jesus.

I like to think of it this way, no matter how I feel, no matter how depressed or weak I become, God has a purpose for my life every day until the day he chooses to take me home. Life is not about me being comfortable. It is about making Jesus' name famous no matter what situation I find myself facing every

day. If you think life is about being comfortable, I can understand why suicide comes to mind when life becomes hard. But that is not the purpose of life. It is about making Jesus famous no matter how difficult each day becomes.

And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell upon his sword and died with him. 1 Samuel 31:5 (ESV)

This is one of the hard parts about suicide, especially from people in noteworthy positions, like King Saul. Suicide encourages other people to take their life. This is called the copy-cat factor. For example, when Marilyn Monroe committed suicide in the 1970s, the US suicide rate rose 12 percent. Young adults who were struggling in life wanted to follow her example and take their own lives.

We have the young man who carried King Saul's armor and admired the king, killing himself in the same way the king died because he was trying to follow his hero. What a terrible legacy to leave behind. Those who commit suicide, and those who participate in assisted suicide, leave a terrible legacy for their children and grandchildren in the years after their death. In the back of their mind, they wonder if, when life feels hopeless, they should take their life too.

One of Cindy's grandfathers was a successful businessman. He came down with cancer and blew out his brains out with a gun. His wife came home to find his brains splattered on the ceiling. Decades later, when we remember him, while we remember many positive things, there is a dark cloud over his life and the memory of how he ended his life. There is always a lingering feeling left in everyone's mind when life gets hard, will I do the same thing? What a terrible

legacy to leave for your children when you either commit suicide or assisted suicide.

I have told you before about my Uncle Harvey in the past. He died when I was probably somewhere between 8 to 10 years of age. He and his wife were old as dirt when I was a kid. I still remember the vegetable garden in his backyard. His wife had surgery, and something went wrong. She never woke up. She was a vegetable. With a tube in her stomach, she stayed in that vegetative state for five years in a nursing home until she died. When his wife went into the nursing home, he would walk across town to visit her once or twice a day. It didn't matter if it was snowing, raining, or blistering sun; he hobbled across town to visit her in the nursing home. He would turn her in bed to prevent the bed sores. He would hold her hand and talk to her so she wouldn't be alone. She just laid in bed unresponsive the entire time. This went on for years. Every once in a while, her hand would squeeze his. We don't know if that was the only way she could say, "I love you," or if it was an involuntary reflex. He had no idea what a powerful impact he made on an 8 to 10-year-old kid when I saw him care for her until years later, she took their last breath and went home to be with Jesus.

When I was 24 and getting married, I remember thinking, I don't know how life will finish, but if my wife gets sick when she is old, I want to finish my days just like Uncle Harvey did with his wife, caring for her until her last breath. He left behind a positive legacy for me to follow. Suicide destroys that. This is another reason it is not a god-honoring way to die.

The text continues with these words.

Thus Saul died, and his three sons, and his armor-bearer, and all his men, on the same day together. 1 Samuel 31:6 (ESV)

When it says all his men, that is not referring to the entire army. It refers to the secret service soldiers around Saul, his royal guard assigned to protect his life.

3. Remember the good works of fallen spiritual leaders, not just the bad.

And when the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley and those beyond the Jordan saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned their cities and fled. And the Philistines came and lived in them. 1 Samuel 31:7 (ESV)

Once the people of Israel saw their king dead, they gave up hope and ran for their life. All the Israelites in this area, even on the east side of the Jordan river, abandoned their homes and ran for safety. That made the rest of the war an easy victory for the Philistines. All they needed to do was move into the abandoned cities. This Philistine victory cut Israel in half. It separated the northern tribes from the southern tribes. It diminished the nation economically and militarily. Imagine the east coast and the west coast of the United States were cut off from one another because another country conquered the mid-west. That is what happened.

Saul's sin didn't just lead to his suffering, but the death of his sons and the suffering of the entire nation. This is a theme we have looked at many times. When we sin, others suffer. When we follow God, others under us are blessed.

The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. 1 Samuel 31:8 (ESV)

There were a lot of dead bodies. Stripping the bodies was a useful way to acquire military equipment and other items of value. Saul was worried the

Philistines would torture him if they captured him alive. He wasn't alive, but they did desecrate his body in death.

So they cut off his head.... 1 Samuel 31:9a (ESV)

David cut off Goliath's head. He was the Philistine giant. Now the Philistines cut off Saul's head. He was the Israelite giant. The events of 1 Samuel 31 are also described in 1 Chronicles 10. The chapter is virtually identical to 1 Samuel 31, but it gives a few additional details. One of them is what the Philistines did with Saul's head.

And they put his armor in the temple of their gods and fastened his head in the temple of Dagon. 1 Chronicles 10:10 (ESV)

That is a gross trophy of war, but they are Philistines. Two generations before, when the Philistines destroyed Israel, they put the Ark of the Covenant in Dagon's temple. Now they stick Saul's head in Dagon's temple.

...and stripped off his armor.... 1 Samuel 31:9b (ESV)

His royal armor was gone forever. His body lay completely naked on the ground without a head.

...and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines, to carry the good news to the house of their idols and to the people. 1 Samuel 31:9 (ESV)

They wanted everyone to know their Gods were better than those of Israel. Their gods defeated the God of Israel. One of the results of our sin is not just our suffering, but God's name is diminished.

They put his armor in the temple of Ashtaroth, and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan. 1 Samuel 31:10 (ESV)

Ashtaroth was the Philistine female goddess of war. She was the counterpart of Dagon, their fish god. The temple of Dagon ended up with Saul's

head. Saul's armor went to the temple of Ashtaroath as a war trophy for bragging rights.

The body of king Saul and his sons was another matter. Those bodies were fastened to the wall of Beth-shan. That means they were skewered on a tree that was stuck in the side of a wall, so the bodies hung like flags. The bodies were left outside to rot, and the birds ate their flesh. This was a way to disrespect Saul and his sons.

The final scene of this chapter is surprising. Saul reigned for approximately 40 years. He spent the last ten years of his life rebelling against God, even visiting a witch. He tried to commit suicide and assisted suicide. After he died, his body and the bodies of his sons were treated extremely disrespectfully. The surprise is that some people did not want Saul's body disrespected in death.

If you were with us for earlier parts of this series, you would remember the beginning of Saul's reign. He was a reluctant leader, but when he heard something terrible happening to his fellow Israelites, the Holy Spirit came upon him, and he came to their rescue. Do you remember his first military campaign? It was against Nahash the Ammonite. Nahash was the guy conquering cities east of the Jordan river. In every city he conquered, he gouged out the inhabitants' right eyes to keep them powerless and humiliated. There was one city left on the east side of the Jordan River for him to conquer. It was the city of Jabesh-Gilead. When Nahash came, they sent messengers through the country asking for help, praying, and hoping God would rescue them. When king Saul heard about this,

the Holy Spirit came on him, and he embarked on his first military campaign. He organized the nation. They didn't just save the people of Jabesh-Gilead, but they completely wiped out Nahash the Ammonite. At the end of it, Saul gave glory to God. When we studied that part of 1 Samuel, we called that message "Saul's finest hour." It was Saul's finest hour. Unfortunately, his reign went down hill from there.

The important part is that the people of Jabesh-Gilead hadn't forgotten what Saul did to save them 30 or 40 years before his tragic end. When they heard how the Philistines abused his body, look what they did.

But when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men arose and went all night and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and they came to Jabesh and burned them there. And they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh and fasted seven days. 1 Samuel 31:11–13 (ESV)

This was not an easy task. Jabesh-Gilead was over ten miles from Beth-shan, where the bodies hung. Their best warriors traveled all night. During the night, they took the bodies of Saul and his sons off the wall and carried them ten miles back to Jabesh-Gilead, where they cremated them. They kept the bones and buried them under a tamarisk tree.

2 Samuel gives us a little more details about what they did.

David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan from the men of Jabesh-gilead, who had stolen them from the public square of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hanged them, on the day the Philistines killed Saul on Gilboa. 2 Samuel 21:12 (ESV)

The bodies were not hanging outside of the town. They were hanging inside the city. That was an extremely high-risk mission, all to make sure the bodies of Saul and his sons were respected.

There is good application for us in these verses. How do we handle fallen leaders in the church? Yes, leaders in the church may have made sinful choices and God brought their ministries to a tragic end, but we should not forget to be thankful for the good God did through them in earlier years. Let us not become people that completely write off Christians leaders when they make sinful choices in their later years. I am not condoning sinful choices by anyone. The text reminds us to not forget to be thankful for the good things God did through a leader's life when they were walking with God.

Examples of this include Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Church in Chicago. At one time, they were the largest church in the nation. It came out that there was some inappropriateness taking place with Bill at one time in his life. Yes, that is a tragic thing, but let us not neglect to be thankful for all the good God did for the kingdom through Bill's life. The same could be said of James MacDonald, Mark Driscoll, and many others. Let us be people that celebrate the good things God does through the lives of other Christian leaders. May the sinful choices some leaders make in their lives not eclipse the good God has done in their life so that we completely forget it.

4. King Saul failed to save his people, but King Jesus didn't fail to save us.

As we close 1 Samuel, the text is clear that while King Saul was to save his people, he began well, but he failed miserably in the end. In 2 Samuel, King David will have the task of saving God's people. Spoiler alert. He also will fail miserably. All the kings God put over his people in history failed to one degree or another. There is only one king that did not fail us. He is the one worth following. His name is Jesus.

What does King Saul teach us about death? Four things.

Applications

1. A successful life is not necessarily long, but it is faithful.
2. Suicide is not a god-honoring way to die.
3. Remember the good works of a fallen spiritual leader, not just the bad.
4. King Saul failed to save his people, but King Jesus didn't fail to save us.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, and time with his family. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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