

1 Samuel 31 – The King Is Dead

November 27, 2022

Background

What does King Saul teach us about death?

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)

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

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

- These sons gave up their lives protecting a failed father. Their lives were a success not because they were long but because they were faithful.

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

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

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

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)

...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)

• **The six suicides in the Bible are all portrayed as tragic ends.**

1. King Saul — 1 Samuel 31
2. King Saul's Armor-bearer — 1 Samuel 31
3. Abimelech — Judges 9
4. Ahithophel — 2 Samuel 17
5. Zimri — 1Kings 16
6. Judas — Matthew 27

• **Suicide is a form of murder.**

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)

• **Hopelessness is not a time for suicide.**

- Ecclesiastes 2:17 - Solomon reached the point where he "hated life".
- 1 Kings 19:4 - Elijah was fearful and so depressed he wanted to die.
- Jonah 4:8 - Jonah was angry at God and wanted to die.
- 1 Corinthians 1:8 - Paul was so down he despaired of life itself.
- Job - Lost everything and his health. His wife told him to curse God and die.
- When Solomon despaired of life is when he learned the duty of man was to fear God and keep his commandments.
- When Elijah wanted to die, he was comforted by an angel.
- When Jonah wanted to die, is when God showed him his sin.
- Job had everything restored to him after God took everything from him.
- Paul, in his despair, learned not to rely on himself but on God who raises the dead.

• **The Bible condemns assisted suicide.**

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)

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)

- **Suicide leads to copycat deaths.**

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)

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)

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)

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)

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

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)

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

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

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)

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)

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

Applications

What does King Saul teach us about death?

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.**

Life Group Questions

1. Read 1 Samuel 31. What did you learn in the message that was important to you?
2. Jonathan's death can be considered a tragic end or a faithful end when he defended his father to death. How does faithfulness, until death, toward God and other people change your perspective on what is important in life?
3. Has suicide touched your family? Did this study help? What unanswered questions did it raise?
4. What is your opinion on physician-assisted suicide? Is there a time when it is appropriate? How did this study change your view?
5. Why did the people of Jabesh-Gilead risk their lives to give Saul and his sons a proper burial? What does that teach us about how to honor fallen spiritual leaders?
6. **EXTRA CREDIT:** What are some of the most important lessons you learned in 1 Samuel?