

## 34. A pathetic death of the disobedient

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An old preacher was dying. He sent a message for his Income Tax agent and his Lawyer (both church members), to come to his home. When they arrived, they were ushered up to his bedroom. As they entered the room, the preacher held out his hands and motioned for them to sit on each side of the bed. The preacher grasped their hands, sighed contentedly, smiled and stared at the ceiling.

For a time, no one said anything. Both the IRS agent and Lawyer were touched and flattered that the old preacher would ask them to be with him during his final moment. They were also puzzled because the preacher had never given any indication that he particularly liked either one of them.

Finally, the Lawyer asked, "Preacher, why did you ask the two of us to come?" The old preacher mustered up some strength, then said weakly . . . .  
"Jesus died between two thieves, and that's how I want to go, too.

We all got a good laugh at that. How the person dies often portrays about the character of that person. An aged saint might be on his death bed, but he is not afraid of death, because he is absolutely sure that his Savior would welcome him to the heaven above. But there is an unbeliever who is scare to death of dying.

In chapter 28, Saul was told by Samuel who was sent by God from the life beyond that they would lose the battle next day and he and his sons will be killed. Instead of repenting to the Lord, he went on. His heart was too hardened and once again he pushes away God's inviting merciful hands.

Tragically, Saul never learned that lesson. While David repented in the ashes of Ziklag and strengthened himself in the Lord, Saul in his own strength against the Philistines at Jezreel.

While David consulted the Lord through the ephod of Abiathar the priest, Saul consulted a spiritist at En-dor.

And while David pursued the Amalekites, rescuing his family and restoring his faith, Saul went down in defeat to the Philistines, losing his family, his kingdom, and his life.

### A. PATHETIC TRAGEDY

*1 Sam 31:1-3 Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. Then the Philistines followed hard after Saul and his sons. And the Philistines killed Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua, Saul's sons. The battle became fierce against Saul. The archers hit him, and he was severely wounded by the archers.*

Saul's sons' death was tragic, yet important in God's plan. In taking the logical heirs to Saul's throne, God cleared the way for David to become the next king of Israel. We know that if Jonathan had survived, he would have gladly yielded the throne to David. But the same could not be said of Saul's other sons, so God was merciful to the nation and to David in taking Saul's sons in battle. God was also merciful to Jonathan, sparing him the ordeal of having to side with David against his

own brothers. Because there was another son of Saul who didn't go into the battle and lived until David became a king of Israel.

Saul's sins cost him his life-but not his only. How many innocent people, including godly Jonathan, suffered and died that day because of the consequences of Saul's sin? We must never think that we live or die only to ourselves.

*1 Sam 31:4-6 Then Saul said to his armorbearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and thrust me through and abuse me." But his armorbearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it. And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword, and died with him. So Saul, his three sons, his armorbearer, and all his men died together that same day.*

This account of Saul's death is different from that given by the Amalekite in 2 Sam 1:6-10. I see it in two possibilities:

1) The Amalekite's story was probably a fabrication intended to win David's approval.

2) The Amalekite's story might be true. Saul may have survived from his suicide and still breathing and asked for the Amalekite's help. Remember the Lord told Saul through prophet Samuel to eliminate the entire tribe of Amalekites, but Saul was disobedient and didn't do that in chapter 15. That was the turning point of Saul's life from the God's anointed king to the disobedient and cursed one.

If Saul obeyed the Lord, he wouldn't be in the position of suicide or being killed by the very one he was supposed to eliminate.

That is like our sins in our lives. If we don't eliminate the sin that hurts our relationship with our God from our lives, guess what? That very sin would come back to haunt us to our spiritual death or even physical death.

The essential sin that led to Saul's foolishness is "self-will."

The Philistines were not Saul's worst enemies, His worst foe was himself.

Saul's downhill slide did not happen overnight but over many years. And ultimately, like a rotting tree collapsing on itself, his self-centeredness and self-will ended in self-destruction.

A bad decision does not start out of nowhere. It starts with a very small compromise. Then erosion starts.

Listen to this rhyme about compromise:

Because of lack of nail, a shoe was lost.

Because of lack of a shoe, a horse was lost.

Because of lack of a horse, a rider was lost.

Because of lack of a rider, a crucial battle was lost.

Because of loss of the battle, the war was lost.

Because the war against the nation was lost, they lost country.

It all starts at a small thing.

Saul figured it was better to die quickly at the hand of a trusted friend than in slow agony at the hand of a sadistic enemy. Perhaps the saddest part of this scene is

what Saul didn't say. Even in his final moments, he neglected to call out to God. No repentance. No reconciliation. Saul faced death as he faced life: with his eyes desperately fixed on his circumstances and himself.

Sin of omission is as bad as sin of commission. Saul has never sought God's guidance in his life at all.

## **B. SUICIDE**

If you haven't noticed, I am a rather determined person with a strong conviction for what I am supposed to do. Many people have the same kind of character like mine. But once they crumble under the self-seeking concept, they go down faster than others. Then, there are other people with deep thinking style. Once they hit the wall, they cannot find a way out (or should I say they choose to pity themselves), they also sink deep.

Many people have faced an option of suicide once or more in their lives, some chose to do so.

It seems that the person who considers suicide doesn't think about the people who would be left behind, because he or she is so wrapped in his or her own problems that cannot see others. The people who had a family member committed suicide feel that it is their faults for that person to die and have unfinished chapter in their lives. That is not true. Everyone should take responsibility of one's own actions.

Is a believer who commits suicide totally lost for eternity?

Definitely not! I believe that a person who is driven to the point of committing suicide no longer has full responsibility for the things he's doing. Driven to a point of such mental extremes, he isn't necessarily responsible for the action of taking his own life.

Suicide is sin. It is the sin of self-murder. Yet, we are wrong if we regard it as the unforgivable sin, and anyone who does commit suicide has given in to the lies and deceptions of satan, whose purpose is to kill and destroy (John 10:10).

Certainly, Scripture doesn't indicate anywhere that this is an unpardonable sin. The only sin for which there is no forgiveness is that of rejecting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

If you are contemplating the option of suicide, or you know someone who is considering, I have this for you: Jesus is the only Hope. Nothing and no one can give you hope like Jesus does. It is not over until Jesus says, "It's over."

## **C. SADISTIC BRUTALITY**

*1 Sam 31:7-10 And when the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley, and those who were on the other side of the Jordan, saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them. So it happened the next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. And they (1) cut off his head and (2) stripped off his armor, and (3) sent word throughout the land of the Philistines, to proclaim it in the temple of their idols and among the people. Then (4) they put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths, and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan.*

Battlefield looting was the rule in ancient time war. The victors gathered clothes, weapons and armor from the slain.

The armor of Saul was displayed in the temple dedicated to the worship of Ashtorethe, the Canaanite goddess of sex and war. It is their trophy against the Israelites and their God.

This is a typical phase of a man who committed sin against God without repentance. Once a man falls for sin all the way down, (1) the devil mercilessly comes after him and (2) strips off his integrity and hope for anything in the future, (3) let the whole world know how that person fell and (4) display the person's disgrace in his place as a trophy.

Saul's tragic death gave opportunity for the enemies of the Lord to disgrace His name.

#### **D. CREMATION**

*1 Sam 31:11-13 Now when the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men arose and traveled 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. Then they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.*

Out of gratitude to Saul for delivering their city (chapter 11), the men of Jabesh Gilead risked their lives to recover the bodies of Saul and his sons and to give them a proper burial.

This is the first record of cremation in the Bible. Some people are absolutely against believers getting cremated after their death. They even claim that it is unbiblical. However, they never show where they find the text that says it is against the Word of God. Cremation is NOT against the Word of God. Cremation does in 37 minutes what the normal body decomposing takes in 30 years.

The main reason of the opponents of cremation is that God may not be able to bring those burned people back at the time of rapture. If God can create the heaven and earth from nothing, of course, He can bring those people back for the rapture at no time.

In my opinion, it is the difference between \$800 cremation vs. \$8000 burial that gets the same result. The family member can pocket \$7200. For me, I don't care. Because I ain't gonna be in my dead body anyway. I'd rather my family to have \$7200 extra and go on to Disney Land than giving money away to a funeral director.

#### **E. APPLICATIONS**

**1) The price of sin is enormous. It not only costs to us, but it effects the people around us.**

We must see sins the way God sees with hatred. We must remember the consequences of our sins.

**2) We must remember that our sins bring disgrace to our God's name.**

If it is not bad enough for the result of our sin effect not only ourselves and the people around us, but also it give a bundle of opportunities to those who are not believ-

ers to blaspheme our God's name because of our sins. Just the thought of that, it makes me shudder. May we never come to that by the mercy of God.

**3) If you know someone who thinks about committing suicide, tell him or her that it is not their place to end the life that is given by God.**

It is God who starts and finishes our lives. There always is hope in God. Come to God, He will comfort you and strengthen you. It is not the end.