

36. Pathetic death of the disobedient

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An old preacher was dying. He sent a message for his 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 his agent and lawyer were touched and flattered that the old preacher would ask them to be with him during his final moment. But they were also puzzled because the preacher had never given any indication that he particularly liked either one of them before.

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, of course, we have to make exceptions of accidental deaths. 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 heaven above. But there is an unbeliever who is scared to death of dying.

In chapter 28, king Saul was told by Samuel who was sent by God from the life beyond that they would lose the battle the 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 pushed away God's inviting merciful hands.

Tragically, Saul never learned the lesson. While David repented in the ashes of Ziklag and strengthened himself in the Lord, Saul, in his own strength, went against the Philistines at Jezreel. While David consulted the Lord through the ephod of Abiathar the priest, Saul consulted a witch 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 Samuel 31:1-6 Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. 2 Then the Philistines followed hard after Saul and his sons. And the Philistines killed Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua, Saul's sons. 3 The battle became fierce against Saul. The archers hit him, and he was severely wounded by the archers. 4 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. 5 And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword, and died with him. 6 So Saul, his three sons, his armorbearer, and all his men died together that same day.

What kind of interpretation are you getting from this paragraph?

Saul's sons' death was tragic, yet important in God's plan. By removing 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 by removing 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. Incidentally, there was another son of Saul, Ishbosheth, who didn't go into the battle and lived until David became a king of Israel.

Saul's sins cost him not only his life, but also his sons. How many innocent people, including godly son 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.

Hosea 8:7a They sow the wind, And reap the whirlwind.

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 attempt 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 it in chapter 15. That was the turning point of Saul's life from 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 dilemma or even physical difficulties.

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 backslide 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 the blue. It starts with a very small compromise. That's how erosion starts.

You might have heard this rhyme about compromise:

Because of the lack of a nail, a shoe was lost.

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

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

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

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

It all starts at a small thing.

Saul figured it was better to die quickly at the hand of someone on his side supposedly than in slow torturous 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.

The sin of omission is as bad as the sin of commission. Saul has never sought God's guidance in his life at all, including in his deathbed.

B. SUICIDE

If a born-again Christian commits suicide, does that person go to hell in spite of one's salvation? Some denomination Bible teachers insist that if a born-again believer commits suicide, he will end up in hell because he cannot repent from his sin of self-murder.

If that is a right theology, we have two very important questions to ponder:

1) Do all Christians ask God to forgive ALL of their sins ALL THE TIME by remembering them each one?

If you are as forgetful as me, we are in deep doo-doo in that case.

2) How do they know that the person who committed suicide already asked the Lord to forgive his sin of suicide before he killed himself?

If those teachers say, "That doesn't count," I have to ask them another question, "Have you ever sinned against the Lord even though you knew exactly what you were about to do was a sin?" The answer would be "Yes."

The late British theologian G. Campbell Morgan said, "Suicide is always the ultimate act of cowardice." I believe that Morgan was a little too harsh in that statement because he probably was never in the situation of the person who is about to commit suicide – mentally, emotionally, and physically.

Listen, I don't find anywhere in the Bible that talks against suicide in negatively or positively. It simply recorded them. When a person is brought to the point of taking their own life, the act of taking their life is an irrational act. That person just does not see a way out of one's life dilemma. Anyone who does commit suicide has given in to the lies and deceptions of satan, whose purpose is to kill and destroy according to John 10:10.

There is one primary problem with this line of thought: it does not recognize that Jesus died for ALL of our sins. When God purchased us with the blood of Christ, ALL of our sins were paid for. If a person who has truly received Jesus Christ as Savior, which is demonstrating that he/she has been redeemed, reconciled, forgiven, justified, etc., by God, commits suicide, the sin of suicide was covered by the blood of Christ. Now, we can question whether a true Christian could commit suicide, but, if a true Christian were to commit suicide, it would be forgiven. Verses that connect confession with forgiveness, such as 1 John 1:9, are referring to relational forgiveness between a believer and God, not the judicial forgiveness that was perfectly accomplished by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. No, suicide is not an unforgivable sin. Suicide is not greater than the price Jesus Christ paid with His atoning sacrifice.

It is wrong to take your own life, and it is a very cruel act toward those who remain, but I don't believe that God would condemn that person to hell if he or she is a born-again believer. Again, it is not an unpardonable sin. Our God's grace, mercy, and love cover much more than what we can think.

C. SADISTIC BRUTALITY

1 Samuel 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.

What do you see here?

Battlefield looting was the rule in the 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 Ashtoreth, the Canaanite goddess of sex and war. It is their trophy against the Israelis and Israel's God.

This is a typical phase of a man who sinned against God without repentance. Once a man falls for sin all the way down:

- 1) **The devil mercilessly comes after him**
- 2) **Strips off his integrity and hope for anything in the future**
- 3) **Let the whole world know how that person fell**
- 4) **Display the person's disgrace in his place as a trophy.**

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

D. CREMATION

1 Samuel 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.

What is your interpretation of this?

Out of gratitude to Saul for delivering their city that was mentioned in 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 Christians and denominations 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 for the opponents of cremation is that God may not be able to bring those burned people back at the time of the rapture. If God can create heaven and earth from nothing, of course, He can bring those people back for the rapture in no time.

In my opinion, \$600 cremation or \$10,000 burial gets the same result. The family member can pocket \$9,400 by going for cremation. For me, I don't want my family

wasting money on the body that will rot under the ground or even putting it in a toast oven. I just signed up for the Willed Body Program for the University of Arizona College of Medicine so that the medical students learn their medicine by using my body. No cost to my family.

E. APPLICATIONS

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

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

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