

THE LAST DAYS OF THE HOUSE OF SAUL

1. NO MAN IS AN ISLAND

I Samuel 31:1, 2

John Donne, wrote in 1624:

“No man is an island,
Entire of itself;
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less,
As well as if a promontory were:
As well as if a manor of thy friend's
Or of thine own were.
Any man's death diminishes me,
Because I am involved in mankind.
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
It tolls for thee.”

Saul, living in continual rebellion against God dragged his sons into his chastening. We do not know the spiritual and moral condition of Abinadab or Malchishua, Saul's other sons, but we know the spiritual and moral condition of Saul's son, Jonathan.

No man lives to himself; no man dies to himself. We observe in the story of Achan, that the sin of Achan affected the battle all Israel was involved in. Joshua 7:12: “Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you.” And with a heavy heart we read that the sin of Achan cost his family's life as well. Joshua 7:24, 25: “And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the LORD shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones.” When we sin, it should be known, it always affects others, especially those closest to us. II Samuel 12:13, 14: “And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.”

We see no contradiction in God's judgment affecting people not personally involved, but we need to bring the following study to explain. Ezekiel 18:20: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.” Bearing this truth in mind, how do we reconcile the penalty of other's sins affecting the innocent? These verses will give light. Isaiah 57:1: “The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.” Here we see godly people, such as Jonathan are delivered from worse things in the future by what appears to be a premature death. God was not being arbitrary in His actions, He had a loving plan for Jonathan's demise. And the same could be said of the child of wicked Jeroboam. I Kings 14:13: “And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him: for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward

the LORD God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam.” God saw something precious in the little child of Jeroboam and took him to heaven. Perhaps my favorite sermon by the prince of preachers (Spurgeon) is from John 20:15 entitled, “Supposing Him to Be the Gardener.” Spurgeon’s point was that Mary Magdalene was not mistaken when she mistook the Risen Lord for a gardener. Here’s a quote from that sermon on December 31, 1882: “Alas, my brother, thou art brought very low, for the delight of thine eyes is taken from thee. But here is our comfort: the Lord hath done it. The best rose in the garden is gone. Who has taken it? The gardener came this way and gathered it. He planted it and watched over it, and now he has taken it. Is not this most natural? Does anybody weep because of that? No; everybody knows that it is right, and according to the order of nature, that He should come and gather the best in the garden. If you are sore troubled by the loss of your beloved, yet dry your grief by ‘supposing him to be the gardener.’”

2. ON DEATH AND DYING

I Samuel 31:3-5

Saul has a difficult time accepting his situation and decides to take matters in his own hands.

Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross wrote of five stages of dying in her famous book entitled *On Death and Dying*. Phase 1: Denial: When confronted with the diagnosis of a terminal illness people will often react with this kind of statement, “No, it can’t be true, not me.” Phase 2: Anger: Kubler-Ross says, “It is basically a way to mask vulnerability.” You might say it is a type of “whistling in the dark” phase. Phase 3: Bargaining: This is when the “...person might bargain for less pain, more time with dear ones, or a miraculous cure.” Phase 4: Depression: “Once time passes by, a dying person realizes more and more the fact that the inevitable will happen no matter what they do. This is when they might become depressed. Patients will start grieving their separation from loved ones.” Phase 5: Acceptance: “This period is represented by peace and calm. It is the stage in which patients truly accept their situation without trying to fight it anymore. It is their last gift to their loved ones.”

The Christian can supersede the mere coping with death; the Bible says in Hebrews 2:14, 15: “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” Psalm 23:4: “Yeah though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

There are five records of suicide in the Bible. The first two suicides are in our text, Saul and his armor bearer. Ahithophel is found in II Samuel 17:23. Zimri in I Kings 16:18 and Judas in Matthew 27:5. In 2015, more than 44,000 Americans died by suicide—one death every 12 minutes, as the Department of Health and Human Services put it. The overall suicide rate has grown by nearly 30 percent over the past 15 years, prompting some to call it a new public health crisis. The suicide rate for teenagers is climbing. It is now the third leading cause of death among young people aged 15–24, and the second leading cause of death among college students. For every completed suicide, estimates assert that there are as many as 25 attempted suicides. Author David Foster Wallace, who suffered from severe depression and ended up taking his own life at a young age, once wrote that the choice to commit suicide is like the choice between staying in a burning building or leaping from the window to one’s death. The choice is unbearable, nearly impossible: You’d have to have personally been trapped and felt flames to really understand a terror way beyond falling.”

How should we respond to someone contemplating suicide?

A. Take them seriously. A common saying is that someone who talks about it will not go through with it. Statistically, that has been proven gravely wrong. People who attempt it very often talk about it. Luke 6:45: “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which

is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.”

B. Empathize with them. Listen attentively to what they are experiencing. The prophet Ezekiel was an expert at empathizing. Ezekiel 3:15: “Then I came to them of the captivity at Telabib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days.”

C. Seek professional help soon. You may have to convince them that it is no more unspiritual to go to a professional in this realm than it is seek a heart doctor for heart disease or a cancer specialist for cancer. Luke 5:31: “And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick.”

3. THE SPHERE OF INFLUENCE IN LIFE AND DEATH

II Samuel 1:17-27

After the Battle of Gilboa, the cruel Philistines beheaded Saul and hung his and his three sons' bodies disgracefully to the wall of Bethshan. The valiant men of Jabeshgilead jeopardized their lives to pull the bodies of Saul and his brave sons off the wall and give them a proper burial. Herein, we see the power of the good influence in the early days of Saul when he bravely came to the aide of the men of Jabeshgilead.

In II Samuel 1, an Amalekite tried to take credit for taking Saul's life, but his facts did not match what happened. The Bible said that Saul fell upon his sword (I Samuel 31:4). The young Amalekite said Saul leaned upon his spear (II Samuel 1:6). This contradiction of which weaponry was used documents the lie. Rather than win David's favor, the Amalekite lied himself into a death sentence.

The sphere of our influence has the ability to go beyond our life. Saul spoke of the legacy he was leaving. I Samuel 26:21: “...behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly.” David does speak well of Saul, commemorating the good that he had done. David cried, “...how are the mighty fallen.” (II Samuel 1:19b). II Samuel 1:23: “Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.”

In this passage, we see that Jonathan was not only known for being a great marksman with the bow, but he taught it to the youth of Judah (II Samuel 1:18). II Samuel 31:25 informs us that Jonathan was slain in the high places. In other words, he had taken the high ground. That is the story of Jonathan's life, always taking with honor the high ground. Then finally David said in II Samuel 1:26, “I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.” David and Jonathan had this supernatural friendship that was constant and trustworthy. Their friendship was something that went beyond the grave. God used the kindness and constant bravery of Jonathan to help school David.

In summary, we should always be willing to glorify God and be the influence He would have us be in this world for God and for good, whether it be by life or by death (Philippians 1:20, 21).

-Pastor Pope-