

The End of King Saul

1 Sam. 31:1-6

Introduction:

1. Since the day of his rejection as king, King Saul's life was marred by unhappiness. His end is no better.
2. Defeated by the Philistines, his three sons killed, he is mortally wounded and fleeing. He put an end to his life by suicide in an attempt to avoid being abused by his enemy. But his plan did not obtain its object. His enemy found his body the next day. They cut off his head and stripped off his weapons and sent them throughout the land of the Philistines. They hung his body on the wall of the city of Beth-shan and so he perished in disgrace.
3. There are a number of ethical questions raised by this text. There is the issue of suicide and, considering 2 Sam. 1, the related issue of so-called mercy killing. There are the ethical issues associated with the treatment of the dead and treating them with contempt versus treating them with respect.
4. It is to these issues that we give consideration.

Discussion:

- I. The issue of suicide (1 Sam. 31:1-6).
 - A. Perhaps you have thought about suicide.
 1. Saul certainly did. His armor bearer did. Judas, who betrayed the Lord, did (Matt. 27:3ff).
 2. Each of these individuals found themselves in a desperate situation. It is likely that they thought that suicide was a reasonable way to escape their desperation.
 3. The Scripture make no ethical statement about what they did. It merely records the fact.
 4. Perhaps you have found yourself in a desperate situation and suicide has crossed your mind.
 - B. Perhaps you have known someone who took his or her own life and wondered what you could have done to prevent it.
 - C. Questions raised.
 1. Is suicide sin?
 2. Is it a sin that cannot be repented of? Is it perhaps the unforgiveable sin since by its very circumstance it does not allow time for forgiveness?
 3. The Scripture never answers these questions directly. But it is appropriate that we ask, "What does the Bible say?" Many are content to give answers on the basis of humanistic thinking without consideration to what Scripture says. I am afraid that some "bible believers" answer without consideration for what Scripture says.
 - D. What Scripture does say.
 1. Human life is valuable (Gen. 9:5-6; cf. Ex. 20:13; Gal. 5:21).
 - a. The value is determined by our relationship to God as created in His image.
 - b. It is not valued on the basis of its "quality," the circumstances—happy vs. unhappy, pleasant vs. unpleasant, desperate, depressing circumstances do not

- determine the value of one's life.
- c. We may find ourselves in mental states when we think we are not valuable. We may feel that we have no control over our circumstances. Suicide is always one thing we can control.
 - d. Taking another person's life is the consideration of Gen. 9:6. But it does establish the respect for human life that we are to have.
 - e. It is defined by the consequence of murder—"By man his blood shall be shed." It is not revenge that it authorized here, but the protection and value of life!!
 - f. It may be that some are in such emotional and mental stress that they are blinded to the value of their own lives. This does not mean that their life is not valuable, only that they are blinded to it. The devil is out to destroy! He will use desperate emotional states to blind us in order to accomplish his objective.
2. Scripture describes death as an enemy (1 Cor. 15:26).
 - a. It is not part of God's intent. He created man to live. In the Garden of Eden was the tree of life. Death was the result of sin. It is not a natural part of our existence.
 - b. God is in the business of providing life. The devil is in the business of destroying.
 - c. Death is not our friend. It may be inevitable that we die (Heb. 9:27) but it is not our friend.
 3. Jesus Christ is the means for overcoming death.
 - a. Heb. 2:14-15.
 - b. 2 Tim. 1:10.
 - c. Life is our friend, not death, and when we find ourselves despairing, and we will, it may be hard for us to see that God's work is life, not death. Is this not the truth that distinguished Job, Paul, and Jesus? Is this not the fundamental truth of Scripture?

II. The issue of euthanasia (2 Sam. 1:1-10).

- A. This follow up to the description given in 1 Sam. 31 identifies an Amalekite perspective.
- B. The Amalekite thought that by presenting himself as "mercifully terminating" the life of Saul that David would be favorable to him.
 1. The Amalekite's story is not consistent with what is said in 1 Sam. 31.
 2. He says that Saul asked him to kill him in light of Saul's mortal wound.
 3. He said that that was what he did.
 4. He may have borrowed this thinking from Saul.
- C. David asked him, "How is it you were not afraid to stretch out your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?" (1:14).
 1. It is obvious that David had great respect for the one God had anointed as king.
 2. But we have already seen that life is to be respected. The Amalekite has both disrespected God's anointed and his life.
 3. In harmony with Gen. 9:6 David had the Amalekite executed. David did not always respect life as he should. He had Uriah murdered. But in this case he appears to be acting consistent with Gen. 9:6.
- D. In the light of modern day medical procedures questions are raised. Is it ever right to

allow death to take place without exhausting every possible option? Is it right to induce or hasten the death of a person in what seems to be a hopeless situation? Is it ever right to decide to not do something that would prolong the life of a sufferer?

1. These are difficult and challenging questions.
2. The danger is that biblical truth will be lost, that we will answer the question without consideration to God's revelation, that we will answer on the basis of our mere human judgment. Will we determine to destroy those with Down's Syndrome? The retarded? The aged? Those whose lives are determined to cost too much?
3. Yes, it is appointed to men once to die (Heb. 9:27) and so there must be some reckoning with this inevitability. But this is different than our choosing to hasten death. The Amalekite was held responsible for hastening the death of Saul.
4. But what about those in terminal conditions, when there is no hope of recovery?
 - a. Would it have been permissible for the Amalekite to have allowed Saul to expire since he saw his death inevitable in light of his mortal wound?
 - b. Would it have been permissible for the Amalekite to have withheld food and water from Saul until he expired?
 - c. What we do know is that he was condemned for "killing him."

III. The issue of respect.

- A. There is another issue in these texts that is fundamental to these discussions that may be overlooked.
 1. Saul committed suicide because he did not want his enemy to "make sport of me." He did not want them to disgrace him.
 2. They did.
 - a. Cut off his head and stripped off his weapons and sent them throughout the land of the Philistines.
 - b. Fastened his body and the bodies of his sons to the wall of Beth-shan.
 - c. In these actions they acted contemptuously.
- B. Valiant men from Jabesh-gilead walked all night and took the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall (31:8ff).
 1. They burned their bodies at Jabesh.
 2. They buried them and fasted seven days.
 3. These men showed kindness. David commended them (2 Sam. 2:4-7). He said, "May the Lord show lovingkindness and truth to you; and I will show this goodness to you because you have done this thing."
 4. The people of God honor life in this way. Funerals. And actions demonstrating respect.
- C. Lovingkindness and goodness is set over against contempt and abuse in this text.
 1. David recognized the Lord as the standard defining goodness.
 2. When this principle is abandoned for Philistine and Amalekite like thinking and practices we are in trouble.
 3. We have witnessed a rash of sexual assault charges and sexual abuse charges in recent months. Powerful men have acted contemptuously and disrespectfully. It is not new!!! Let us not be among them!!!!

Conclusion:

1. It is up to Christians to take the lead in holding the line with regard to respect for human life.
2. It is up to Christians to take the lead in holding the line with regard to respect!!!
3. When we abandon respect for the Lord, the result is we loose respect for one another and sin and death prevail.