

“Saul’s Last Stand!”

I. **INTRO:**

- A. You remember *Custer’s Last Stand* a.k.a. the *Battle of Little Big Horn*. Well, this is *Saul’s Last Stand* & it had about the same disastrous ending.
- B. **Read text:** (13) With these stark & mournful words, the book of 1st Samuel **ends** & the **curtain closes** on the life of Israel’s 1st & most tragic king.
- C. Saul’s sand in his hourglass just ran out!
1. According to legend **King Arthur** was chosen by *pulling a sword from a stone*; **but** according to Scripture *the Lord* had directed His prophet as well as his people in their selection of **Saul**.
 2. While **David** repented in the ashes of Ziklag & strengthened himself in the Lord; **Saul** stood in his own strength against the Philistines.
 3. While **David** consulted the Lord through the ephod of Abiathar the priest; **Saul** consulted a spiritist in Endor.
 4. While **David** pursued the Amalekites, rescuing his family & restoring his faith; **Saul** went down in defeat to the Philistines, losing his family, his kingdom, & his life.
 5. In a vulnerable moment before David, Saul uttered what has come to be his *epitaph*, “**Behold, I have played the fool!**” (26:21b)
- D. **Outline:** **Death**; **Disgrace**; & **Devotion**.

II. **SAUL’S LAST STAND!**

- A. **DEATH!** (1-6)
- B. At the time David’s troops were fighting the Amalekites, the Philistines attacked Saul & the Israelites S/W of the Sea of Galilee on Mount Gilboa.
- C. **What was Saul’s *essential sin* that led to Saul’s foolishness?** Self-will!
1. Saul was called to **theocratic** kingship - He was never meant to have a kingship of **absolute** power. [*theo*/God - *kratia*/power, rule]
 2. **It was never intended that the last word should be with *him*.**
 3. He was to be the human & visible vice-regent of Israel’s Divine & invisible King, Jehovah.

4. Saul could only truly rule the subjects **beneath** him **to** the extent in which he obeyed the supreme King **above** him.¹
 - a) And **like a rotting tree collapsing on itself**, his *self-centeredness* & *self-will* ended in *self-destruction*.
5. **What a reminder for us from Saul's life.** We are God's property! - He has made us kings & queens over our own **personalities w/their gifts & powers & possibilities**; **but** our rule is meant to be theocratic, not an independent, self-directed monarchy! (J. Sidlow Baxter)
 - a) **How have you been ruling your life?** (i.e. monarchy) [**or**, enjoying a theocracy w/ God as the head?]
 - b) **What opportunities, endowments, or advantages** has God given you?
And what can you do to *stay on God's course*?

D. Perhaps the saddest part of the scene is what Saul *didn't* say - even in his final moments he still *didn't* call out to God, still *didn't* repent, still *didn't* reconcile.

1. **He faced death as he faced life:** w/his eyes desperately fixed on *his circumstances & himself*.

E. (4,5) **Suicide** - we'll come back to this.

F. (6) **Saul's sins cost him his life - but not his only!**

1. **How many innocent people died that day because of the consequence of his sin?** - His armorbearer, his 3 sons, so many soldiers.
2. We must never think that we live or die only to ourselves.

G. **DISGRACE!** (7-10)

H. (7) The Philistines had successfully taken command of several strategic **inland trade centers** (they had been confined to the **coastal plains**, since the times of the Judges)

1. **So for them...it was a sweet victory!** - Not only did it increase their wealth & power, but in their thinking, it demonstrated the supremacy of their gods.

I. **DEVOTION!** (11-13)

J. Back in ch.11, Saul started his career by helping the men of **Jabesh Gilead**.

1. He had won the heart of the nation 40 yrs ago & mobilized an Israelite army.
2. **"But now,"** said *Alfred Edersheim*, **"now it was night; & the headless bodies of Saul & his sons, deserted by all, swung in the wind on the walls of Bethshan, amid the hoarse music of vultures & jackals."**

¹ J. Sidlow Baxter, Explore the Book, 6 vols. in 1, vol.2, pg.60

3. So, the men of **Jabesh Gilead** pay their final tribute to the one who rescued them. (plus fasted 7 days in honor of him also!)
- a) And in an **ironic twist**...his story comes full circle as the men of Jabesh Gilead now “rescue” him! - **How far Saul had fallen!**

K. **All the valiant men** - traveled 15-20 miles at night, crossed the Jordan river, went through enemy territory, **then** turned around with the bodies & did it again.

L. They secretly removed the remains of the royal family. Gave them a dignified burial.

1. **Sometimes ministry is messy!** Unfastening bloody mutilated bodies from the wall. Carrying their stiffened, decaying bodies 15-20 miles home. **Sometimes ministry is messy!**
2. **David will later honor them for their feat.** (2 Sam.2:4-7)

M. **Burned their bodies** - to remove the mutilated & decayed flesh & left the bones for burial.

N. Lets talk about **cremation**.

1. Often the question comes up, **is it ok to be cremated?**
2. Since the bible is **silent** on the issue of cremation **preferences** in taking care of loved one's remains should be respected. Certainly, cremation will not hinder God from giving a person a glorified body on the day of resurrection.
 - a) **If I had to argue for it:** I would say **what about a house fire** where bodies are burnt? **What about someone who dies at sea** & the body is never reclaimed? **What is the difference between a body decomposing over 60 years or 60 minutes?**
 - b) Either way, **and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive will be caught up together w/them.**
 - c) **How God decides to raise people up, I don't know...but, if we** only need one cell of our DNA from someone's body to tell us who someone is...**I'm sure He** has it all figured out!
3. **Historically, the Jews** didn't practice cremation. It was important for them to bury their bones “in the land”. (i.e. for the resurrection sake)

O. In **2nd Samuel**, the curtain will rise again, eventually revealing a **new & hopeful** day, as Israel awakens to her wise **shepherd-king, David**.

P. Suicide:

Q. [2007 stats for the U.S.] Number of emergency department visits for **self-inflicted injury**, (i.e. **suicide attempts**) **472,000**. **That's almost 2 every minute.**

1. Intentional Self-harm (or, actual *successful* suicides) that year, **34,598**. (top 3 ways: Firearm, Suffocating, Poisoning).
2. In 2008, **8.3 million** adults(18+) had *serious thoughts* of suicide.
3. **At least 20% are youths between ages 15-24**. (#3 killer among these youths; #2 among college students)
4. **There are more suicides during April & the Christmas season**.
5. Social scientists have noted that **a front-page suicide story** will generate even more suicides.²

R. **For some** the topic of suicide might simply be academic; **to others** it hits too close to home.

1. Maybe *someone you loved* saw it as a solution; **or** maybe thoughts of suicide creep into *your mind* when life's pain seems too much to bear.
2. **God has instilled in each of us a strong instinct to live**.
 - a) But sometimes, when a deep sense of *failure* or *loneliness* or *despair* sets in, **this** desire to live is **overcome** by an *even stronger desire* to die.

S. **Suicide is a very complex act**, so we had better leave the analysis to **God!**

1. **The bible doesn't say much about suicide**. **It records 7 in Scripture**: Abimelech (Judges 9:54 thrust me thru; actually death by armorbearer); Samson; Saul; Saul's armorbearer; Ahithophel; Zimri (King burnt his house down upon him); & Judas.
 - a) Except for *Judas* nothing is said about their destiny. **Judas went to perdition, not because he committed suicide, but because he did not trust Jesus Christ**.
2. Theologians have debated for centuries whether suicides can go to heaven.
 - a) **It is my belief that personal salvation is a completed transaction & the way a person dies cannot rob him of eternal life**.
 - b) I am not giving license to suicide. I am not approving suicide.
 - c) It would be dangerous for **a believer** to bank their eternity on, what I already pointed out, is something *the bible doesn't say much about*. That would be foolish.
 - d) Am am saying, **since suicide is a very complex act, we had better leave the analysis to God**.
3. Growing up, one of my best friends **Steve**, took his life in the Crystal Cathedral, 2 years ago this very week. [knelt in front of the cross, pulled a 22 pistol & shot himself]
 - a) **Death by choice** is the hardest death to deal with.

² Warren Wiersbe & David Wiersbe, *Comforting the Bereaved*, pg.93.

- b) At his memorial I said 2 things: “Do not judge or condemn Steve; that's God's responsibility.” - “Do not judge Steve’s life, by his last hour; that's only a tiny % of his entire life.”
- c) **His struggles:** mental difficulties; guilt from past; shame; torturous voices 24 hours a day. I used Saul as an example of one who choose suicide, instead of torture.
 - (1) I believe Steve did the same. Didn’t make it right. **Suicide is a very complex act, we had better leave the analysis to God.**

T. **Warning signs to help alert you to the suicidal person’s cries for help.** (Chuck Swindoll)

1. **If** someone is talking about suicide; **if** they have an obsession w/death or heaven; **if** they have a sudden change in personality; **if** they have a deep depression, with symptoms ranging from severe despondency to loss of enjoyment in daily activities; **if** they have physical symptoms: *sleeplessness, loss of appetite, decreased sex drive, drastic weight loss, chronic exhaustion*; **if** they have a crisis situation: death of a loved one, failure at school, loss of a job, marital or home problems, a chronic or terminal illness; **if** they have an unprompted preparations for death that may include giving away prized possessions or discussing last wishes w/friends & family.³

U. This morning, if you’ve been struggling with *not wanting to live*, you must be freaking out thinking, **who told him?** - **That’s the H.S. at work...knowing what you needed to hear this morning.** And He whispers, & now uses a bull horn...**CHOOSE LIFE!**

1. Deut.30:19 **Therefore choose life that both you & your descendants may live.**

V. You might ask, **why should I value my life?** Here’s 3 reasons/truths!

1. **Life is a gift** from God to be cherished. [God breathed life into Adam’s nostrils the breath of life]
2. The One who **gives** life, is the only one w/authority to **take** it. [1 Sam.2:6 **The Lord kills & makes alive; He brings down to the grave & brings up**]
3. The Scripture prohibits murder, which includes self murder. [Though shalt not murder]
 - a) **CHOOSE LIFE!**

³ Chuck Swindoll, David. Pg.93