

6/25/23 - 1 Sam. 31 - "Don't Die Dumb"

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[0 : 00] The reading today is from 1 Samuel chapter 31. Now the Philistines were fighting against Israel, and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa.

And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons, and the Philistines struck down Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchishua, the sons of Saul.

The battle pressed hard against Saul, and the archers found him, and he was badly wounded by the archers. Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, Draw your sword and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through and mistreat me.

But his armor-bearer would not, for he feared greatly. Therefore Saul took his own sword, and he fell upon it.

And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell upon his sword and died with him. Thus Saul died, and his three sons, and his armor-bearer, and all his men on the same day together.

[1 : 19] And when the men of Israel, who were on the other side of the valley, and those beyond the Jordan, saw that the men of Israel had fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned their cities and fled.

And the Philistines came and lived in them. The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa.

So they cut off his head and stripped off his armor and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to carry the good news to the house of their idols and the people.

They put his armor in the temple of Ashtaroath, and they fastened his body to the wall of Bethshon.

And when the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men arose and went all night and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Bethshon.

And they came to Jabesh and burned them there. And they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh and fasted seven days.

[2 : 40] This is the word of the Lord. Today we conclude our series in 1 Samuel.

This is the 24th message. And I believe that this probably leaves us with a mixed bag of emotions. Some of us are probably like, man, this is a series that never ended. For some of you, it's a good day. But for many of us, myself included, I reflect back upon the series.

And boy, what a plethora of things that we've learned about who God is and who man is.

Like, considering the things about God, like seeing God's sovereign hand guiding the streams of history. Or God's grace to restore us to Himself.

[3 : 49] Or God caring enough to speak to us and to guide His people. Or even something that we see playing out today, God's finality of judgments.

There being a moment where it's too late. We've learned about man. Man's consequences of being disobedient or being obedient.

Or the seriousness of minimizing sin in our lives. Because it will, what? Unravel us. Or maybe attentiveness when God does speak to His people.

Or maybe the working of our conscience to guide our lives. All of this to say, we stand back and what a wild journey into the depths of God, into the depths of man.

This has been a wonderful series. Most of all, in a series that began with bitterness of barrenness as Israel suffered a leadership conundrum that was happening in 1 Samuel 1.

[5 : 16] As we saw through the life of Hannah, we see at the end of the series today a similar barrenness and bitterness as well through the life of Saul. You see, Israel yearned for a king.

They wanted to look like all the other nations, strong and mighty, where power was in numbers, strength in numbers. They wanted a man who would go out and fight for them.

Enough with this Gideon army junk. You know, we want massive thousands to go out. We want a guy. We don't want 300. We don't want weak, wine-press Gideon leading us.

We want someone strong like all the other nations. And that desire, church, as a reminder, is blatant rejection of the Lord.

The Lord who delivers Israel time and time again, often in odd ways. The strength was in the Lord, not in numbers, but by His hand alone.

[6 : 26] And so Saul was appointed to become the object of this nation's sinful rejection against the Lord. He became an idol.

And God judged this nation by giving them a wicked ruler. Though, that is a hard reality of 1 Samuel.

It's hard. Because God is disciplining His people. I don't know one father that disciplines their son if not motivated by love.

Right? God certainly cared enough about this nation, enough to discipline them, to teach them a truth that they were otherwise unable to understand or accept.

You see, it was the love of God that He chose not to destroy this people, but to discipline them. And this was the most loving act that He could have ever done.

[7 : 36] Now enters chapter 31 in the series, and everything that could go wrong is basically happening. We've been preparing for chapter 31 since arguably chapter 12.

And everything that could go wrong is happening. It's a dark day in Israel, and by the course of their rejection of God's rule and His ways, the Philistines are on their way.

It's a dark day. It's a dark day. And we turn to Saul. He's a man's man. He's the man that all man wanted.

He began very rough with the beginning of cluelessness, insecurity, hiding in baggage. Remember Saul? Hiding among the baggage. This led to a road of jealousy and hatred, which inevitably leads here to a path of blindness, numbness, and complete lostness.

Today's passage, he ends with a tragedy. There's no easy way to putting it. But through the redemption of the cross, we can look upon the gloominess of sin, a tragedy like this, and see the hope of glory.

[9 : 06] And so, what I want us to do is label this sermon gloom of sin and hope of glory. Because I believe when we are able to face death, face the tragedy, full focus, not ignoring it, not brushing it under the rug, facing tragedies, we can then appropriately flee to the cross.

And that's exactly what this passage does for us and what I hope it does to you today, especially if you've entered in through these doors as an unbeliever of Jesus Christ.

So, let's pray as we enter into the passage. I'm going to break it up into two thematic sections, and we will put a bow on the series after today.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word as we look to you to speak to us today.

We pray that these words aren't simply just reiterations of text, but that this black and white text is applied and directly changing and transforming our hearts, and if our hearts, our entire lives.

[10 : 18] We pray that our families might be restored according to the power of your words, and that men are men, and women are women by the power of your word, and that we stand in a culture that's continually down, just deteriorating.

So, we stand for truth upon your all-sufficient, all-authoritative, and powerful word. And to that we turn today. This is no ordinary book.

It's no ordinary time. And so, we ask for you to speak by the power of your Holy Spirit. And we turn to you in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. So, the first of two sections that we're going to see today is, you guessed it, the gloominess of sin.

The chapter begins with verse 1 saying, Now the Philistines were fighting against Israel, and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines and fell, slain, on Mount Skibboa.

[11 : 31] This is similar to last week, only kind of like change in roles, because last week we saw that it was the Amalekites that were in trouble. The Amalekites were fleeing.

The Amalekites were falling slain. But now, the Philistines are conquering. It's a very reversal of a moment.

And in verse 1, at the very moment of this Philistine invasion, I believe that is very closely, at the same time, playing out as last week in chapter 30 with David invading the Amalekites. Almost two simultaneous victories, won by God's people and won by the enemy. And you see, a prophecy is coming true here. This is echoing the context of discovery of the words from Samuel to Saul just earlier in chapter 28.

Remember, Saul being frantic and desperate sought out a witch, we'll just call her, to call Samuel back from the dead. Well, the Lord sent Samuel.

[12:44] And Samuel said to Saul in final words, Why then do you ask me since the Lord has turned from you and become your enemy? In other words, judgment has happened.

There's no turning back. In verse 17, The Lord has done to you as He spoke by me, for the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor David.

Verse 18, Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord and did not carry out His fierce wrath against Amalek.

Therefore, the Lord has done this thing to you this day. Moreover, the Lord will give Israel also with you into the hand of the Philistines and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me.

The Lord will give the army of Israel also into the hand of the Philistines. And this is happening, it's playing out right now in chapter 31.

[13:51] We can't help but see the fulfillment of the divinely inspired words of the prophet Samuel. You see, it was a moment of distress for Saul who was looking for hope.

And what he found was more distress by rediscovering the terrible reality of his unrepentant sin. He was judged.

This is an important reminder for us, church, that time will not forgive sin.

You sin and until you repent, we often forget about offenses and just say, ah, we'll forget about it in a week. The Lord Almighty forgets no sin and there is no unrepentant sin that will be left unjudged.

This is important for us to remember. Time will not forgive sin nor will the Lord forget it. And so, verse 2, as we read, and the Philistines overtook Saul, this is a sad day, and his sons, as the Lord has spoken in chapter 28.

[15:11] And the Philistines struck down Jonathan, Abinadab, Al-Kishua, and the sons, all the sons of Saul. From Saul's perspective here, he's looking around.

If he wasn't desperate before, seeking out a witch, he's getting pretty desperate as the enemies surrounding him, I would imagine. Looking all over for hope.

Seeing the Israelites powerless, fleeing the battle just like before when they were facing the Philistines, but also hearing Samuel's voice echoing in his mind, then to turn to discover his sons are slain.

I don't know if you're in the business of playing games with God and playing games with sin in your life, but this should wake us all up.

You see, historically speaking, generations then were one generation away from being completely extinct. It was serious, to the point where wives would yield to another woman to continue the bloodline of a generation who were barren.

[16:31] Saul, at this time, is completely wiped off the map. Completely. All his sons are gone. In verse 3, having lost everything now, Saul faces the inevitable.

The penalty of sin. What is the penalty of sin? Death. The archers found him.

While you could probably imagine a military advantage being having chariots and everything on land, the Philistines are causing the Israelites to flee into the mountains, which is a great advantage for archers.

And those archers were very, very accurate. And the archers found him. He's just being completely surrounded by the enemy from arrows whistling past his ear.

And in one last act of final disobedience, Saul would not even yield himself to death by the Lord's Word.

[17:39] He took it upon himself in the last act of disobedience, laid the butt of his sword on the ground and fell upon it and took his own life.

In verse 4, not even David's replacement, David was his armor-bearer, not even David's replacement would take his life as Saul was pleading for him to take his life because he wanted to escape the inevitable, death by the Philistines, humiliation by the Philistines.

It's truly a dumb way to die, isn't it? And this armor-bearer then falls in the same way as the king does. Not only do we hear an echo of Samuel's last words to Saul in this passage, but I think as we open up the narrative of Scripture and look a little ways back, we sort of hear the moroseful echo of Judges.

Judges 21-25, in those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

I've realized this week, church, another dumb way to die, and that's hearing the tragic news of men who trusted a submarine that was controlled by a video game controller.

[19 : 07] They rejected the advice and the counsel of engineers that said, this thing's not going to make it. And just to enter this trip into visiting the Titanic.

I know, think about rethinking your honeymoon plans for that. But I can't help but imagine as I've dealt with listening to this unfold this week and then also studying through Samuel, I couldn't imagine a more appropriate final moment of them reaching literally two miles beneath the ocean surface, just passing two miles deep beneath sea level, being very, very similar in these last moments of Saul.

Surrounded in darkness, no way out. anybody has claustrophobia, feeling claustrophobic, you're not going to get out of this one, trapped, and just that impending doom as those men were probably hearing the creaking of that vessel about to implode.

I'd imagine that those men down in the depths of miles into the deep ocean, their last moments before that hydrostatic pressure just imploded their craft with 10,000 tons of pressure caving them in.

Five men instantly consumed, five sons instantly consumed, some husbands, some fathers, whose family will never see again.

[20 : 46] I'm sure this was a moment of distress for them, regret and doubt, and certainly a moment of realization of the gravity and weight that their choices are playing into the history of their lives.

Such a dumb way to die, isn't it? And now, you see, we see Saul. Saul's life is imploding upon himself.

There's gravity and weight of his choices that are playing into history as we see it. And like those five upon the submarine, he's experiencing distress, regrets, and doubt.

You see, a life ending in holding on to sin is very gloomy, very gloomy indeed. And in verse 7, his men were witnessing that gloominess.

They said, we got to get out of Dodge. Right? And they ran. They fled their cities. Israel, God's people are dispersed.

[21 : 50] first. This tragedy and gloom is happening in a region to the north. But we see some hope going on in the south.

Look with me in the second section, the hope of glory. the next day, in verse 8, as it continues, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, they found Saul and his three sons had fallen on Mount Geboa.

And so they did what was customary at that time. They took home their trophy, cut his head off, and stripped off his armor, and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to carry the good news to their house, to the house of their idols, and to their people.

And they put his armor in the temple of Asheroth, and they fastened his body to the wall of Bashan. Huh. The enemy has captured something of God's people once again.

This almost parallels with 1 Samuel 4, where God's people lost the ark. Now God's people have lost their king. And we see again, it appears that the glory has departed Israel in this region.

[23 : 15] The difference, though, is Saul was an idol and fit well within the Philistines' possession. It would be best that he would not return to God's people unless his people fall.

And on Mount Geboa, Saul was discovered dead, his head cut off, stripped of clothes, all dignity, humiliated, and his armor being an object of defeat against Israel's God.

You know, these were God wars. Philistines' God versus Israel's God. So they hung Israel's God as an idol, hung it in the pagan temple of Asheroth.

And we see this king was brought in by public acclamation. He was also ended with public humiliation. And I can't help but see the sufferings of Jesus Christ so vividly.

Can you see it? Him being the true king. As we imagine, the utter humiliation of man towards Saul's lifeless body.

[24 : 21] They didn't care about any honor, nor did anyone care about the honor of Jesus Christ. His disciples, those closest to him, abandoned him. And those he came to save rejected him.

And the declaration of Saul's death proclaimed that Yahweh has been defeated. Israel has no king. They have no land. The Philistine God has won.

And that good news had reached the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead. Remember these farmers? They're the ones who received back the ark of God in chapter 4 and 5.

These are the isolated farmers. They keep to themselves. They remind me of just a Mennonite or an Amish family that don't have a TV. They don't watch the news.

They don't know what's going on between Saul and Israel. They hear people crying and swords blazing, but they don't know what's going on. But at their discovery of this reversal, it was bad news.

[25 : 35] And these brave men risked their lives on behalf of the respect of not burying the dead. This was a serious thing, a religious call to the people of God to bury their dead.

Abraham went to great lengths to bury Sarah in Genesis. And Jacob made Joseph swear not to bury himself in Egypt. And these people were literally set apart by society and set apart by spirituality.

You see, God's people are to be set apart. In this region to the north, there was still a remnant of hope that there are people who are set apart from this evilness.

And so they retrieve Saul's body and his sons. They burn him probably to hopefully make them unrecognizable.

They bury his bones. And look where they bury him in verse 13. Saul, he was a man who appreciated his trees, wasn't he? His burial site seemed quite appropriate then.

[26 : 45] A location where his anger was once alive in chapter 22. His anger then was laid to rest. He died angry.

He died in sin. And in verse 13, God's people mourns. It seems that the glory of God has indeed departed.

That's in the north region. Church, don't we avoid the thought of death like the plague?

You ever have those moments of realization like, I'm going to die someday. Because we get so caught up in this life and you kind of get freaked out. If you have anxiety, that's a good way to trigger a panic attack.

Now, this heart here is going to be dead. There's going to be someone else in the pulpit here. They're not going to know who Brent was. Everything gone.

[27 : 49] I mean, if you ever want to ruin a night out with your loved ones, I mean, go ahead and shop on Amazon for your gravestones. That's a good table talk for you. That'll spark a fire with that girlfriend or boyfriend.

Or maybe consider replanning your wills and talking about what you're going to, where everything's going to go when you die. That's a good way to set the mood. Definitely. But we avoid it like the plague.

But why does the narrator of this book not avoid it? In fact, if you look forward, whenever the Lord wills that we get into 2 Samuel someday, 2 Samuel begins reflecting back upon death.

There's death on this book and there's death on that book all the same instance. And we should see a structural emphasis of that point.

We need to deal with death. All of us. Saul's death and the gravity of what that played out in his life and also what it's going to play out in our lives as well.

[28 : 59] Now, it really should be odd, I think, as you're thinking about this. No one wants to talk about the very thing that we're all going to one day face. Isn't that odd?

In fact, my role as a pastor is not only equipping you for this life, but also preparing us all for death. I'm a funeral director. Add that in my job description, elders.

And I'm not telling you to think lightly of death either. Because death is often difficult, it's many times tragic.

But what I am compelled for us to do today is stop fixing our gaze north. To pay careful, careful attention to where you direct your gaze when death does come.

And if you're not a believer today, I have to speak directly to you. I will say, wrapping your head around what's going on in the north ought to humble you to your bones.

[30 : 11] To see the hopelessness of when you die in your sin. There is no hope. It is a dumb way to die.

But for believers, might we fix our gaze just 100 miles south where 2 Samuel will pick up? Because north, God was abandoning His people. South, God was ever-present. North, men were powerless against the enemy.

And south, men were powerful against the enemy. All of this was merely a shadow of things to come.

Israel's hope was simply David. Their hope was to the south where David was. But he is one who would fail miserably and he would write that psalm that we prayed in our time of confession today in Psalm 51 who messed up royally.

[31 : 31] And guess what? He would die as well. So Israel's hope in all the world is not to see just to the south, but see to the shadow that it casts forward of things to come.

The shadow being Jesus Christ. In fact, as we see the gloominess of sin playing out at Mount Gilboa, we see more vividly the cross, the hope of glory at Mount Golgotha.

The tragedy of Saul's death should remind us of the tragedy of every human being, especially when our rejection of God and His Word reaches His judgment.

There's no second chances. I don't care what Catholic priests told you about purgatory. It's not real. It's a fictional land. This is serious.

[32 : 45] Saul's death should remind us of the tragedy of that when we reject that truth. Because only then when we realize that, we will see the glory of the cross so vividly displayed.

Salvation is within our grasp. You and me today. If you have breath in your lungs and that ticker pumping in your chest, there is hope.

Don't walk out of here with the same rejection that you entered in. Saul's death fueled a gospel.

This gospel of good news, it seemed, to the enemy that God had been defeated and that death had won.

And it was the same gospel that spread out all throughout Jerusalem. That man had won. That they've restored their religious systems of pharisaical nonsense.

They got rid of the troublemaker. And the enemy made it appear for three days that God had been defeated and that death had won.

[34 : 05] But Christ's resurrection fueled a gospel. This gospel, the true gospel that still is resounding and echoing today, is that God had won and death has been defeated.

Amen? And through the glory of the cross and the power of God's working in our lives, our story does not have to end in the way of the north.

There is hope of glory of what's going on in the south. You see, don't run from this tragedy because the gloominess of sin magnifies the hope of glory.

It does. Where God conquered just as Hannah proclaimed in Samuel chapter 2. The Lord kills, she says, and brings to life.

He brings down to Sheol and raises up. The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces as it were in the south. Against them He will thunder in heaven as He did in the south.

[35 : 17] The Lord will judge the ends of the earth as He did in the north. And He will give strength to His king and exalt the power of His anointed as He did in the south.

You see, you cannot be over-hyper-focused on everything going on in the north without a balanced perspective of what's also going on in the south.

In other words, the failure of Saul, almost a mark and a type of Adam's disobedience that corrupted mankind reminds us of the victory of Christ, the second Adam, the hope of glory.

If you're not in Christ today, this is it. Don't die dumb. And to Christians, don't live dumb.

Don't waste your life. Don't get caught up on the wrong side of God's judgments. In the words of Samuel in his farewell speech, I think it's plainly clear in chapter 12 verses 24.

[36 : 27] as the nation was teetering upon restoration or following into the abyss.

Samuel simply said something that we ought to remember. As he said, fear the Lord and serve Him faithfully.

Fear the Lord and serve Him faithfully, church. May we remember this series and cling tightly to its truths.

May we remember this series and cling tightly to its truths as we continue God's mission at Steel Valley Church. As we reveal the hope of the world all around.

Let's pray.