

Introduction

The Bible says a lot that the world disagrees with, but there are some things that the Bible asserts that the world does recognize to be true. For example, Galatians 6:7 says, "for whatever one sows, that will he also reap." Even people who do not follow Christ recognize the validity of this statement. The world calls it a saying. Author Stephen Covey has written, "Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny." How true. And this morning, we see this law of sowing and reaping is borne out in the life and in the death of King Saul.

[Read text and Pray]

The LORD acquiesced to Israel's demand for a king, but Israel's kings would not be like all the other kings of the world. They would be king by the choice and anointing of the Lord. They would be gifted by His Spirit. They would be required to act according to His directives. So, in essence Yahweh was still the true king and the human king of Israel was in fact more like a deputy through whom the LORD would rule. The key issue then would be the human king's acceptance of the LORD's authority and submission to his orders.

Saul was the first to be anointed as human king in Israel. He was the kind of guy that would appeal to those who demanded to have their own king. He was handsome and tall; he had the look. But he lacked the heart. We knew Saul's final day would come, and we knew it would not be pretty. Going back to 1 Samuel 13, Saul had been told by the Lord's mouthpiece, Samuel, to wait for him at Gilgal. He would come and offer burnt offerings and give Saul the Lord's directives. Saul waited but not long enough. Before Samuel arrived he went ahead and offered the sacrifice himself. Samuel informed him then that his dynasty would not continue. Then came the test of obedience in regard to the Amalekites. Yahweh told Saul to make a complete annihilation, but he did not. And then the Lord rejected him from being king; the Lord sent Samuel to anoint David to replace him.

When David resisted the opportunity to take Saul's life with his spear, he made a foreboding statement. He said, "the LORD will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish." Then came the day when the Philistines were gathered for a great battle. Saul was tormented with fear and longed for the Lord's guidance. But the Lord was not giving it, so he went to the necromancer to inquire of Samuel. The Lord permitted Samuel to appear, and he informed Saul that the next day the LORD would give Israel into the hands of the Philistines and he and his sons would die. This chapter recounts the coming to pass of those events. It is a dark day on which Saul is reaping the results of what he had sown. And that is one truth that stands out, but the chapter presents to us several others.

I. Not All Is Dark in the Midst of the Darkness.

As dark and sorrowful as this chapter is, there are a couple points that stand out in contrast. They are the light in the midst of this darkness.

A. The first point of light is Jonathan. Now it is sad that he winds up dead. In fact his is the first name mentioned of the killed. "The Philistine's struck down Jonathan." We might well sorrow over Jonathan's death. He was a godly man. He is the one who was loyal to David. They became the best of friends. Jonathan believed in David as the one God had chosen to be the next king. He told

David he would be by his side when he was crowned. Jonathan is the one who strengthened the heart of David in God when his own father was seeking David's life. Jonathan could find David when Saul could not, but he kept his location close to his vest. It is clear that Jonathan loved the Lord like David did, and that is apparently what drew them so close to one another as friends. Here was a man David could have used on his staff to govern the nation well.

The tragedy is that he was killed by the Philistines. But at the same time it is not a tragedy. Jonathan was doing what a good and loyal son and lover of Israel would be doing. He was honoring his father and he was fighting for the security of God's people. Unlike his father, however, the faithfulness of Jonathan is what led to his death. He was giving his life as a sacrifice in obedience to the Lord.

We may think of others who have lost their lives in their prime while living faithfully to the Lord. Think for example of Jim Elliott, Ed McCully, Roger Youderian, Pete Fleming, and Nate Saint. All of these were less than 33 when they were killed in Ecuador in 1956. They were murdered by the Auca Indians as they attempted to get the gospel to them. Like Jonathan they were faithful to their calling. And ultimately while it seems untimely to us, it is not a tragedy when a man or woman remains faithful in the calling God has for them. It is not tragic when we live out the words of Martin Luther, "Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also, the body they may kill, God's truth abideth still; His kingdom is forever."

Moreover, in death Jonathan would be joining the Lord whom he loved. He had laid aside a kingdom he could not have for a kingdom he could not lose. Is it really a tragedy when a man or woman of God dies? We should be reminded of the prayer of Jesus in John 17. There he prayed for his followers that they would join him where he is. Every time a man or woman of God dies, this prayer of Jesus is being answered. It is light in the darkness when God's people remain faithful. We don't have to die physically in order to do that, but we do have to die to ourselves. We have to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow. If we do that, then it is not a tragedy, no matter what the temporary worldly outcome is.

In Philippians 2:15, Paul writes that we should "be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world." That was Jonathan. You and I may also be rays of light in the midst of darkness whether by life or death if our lives are characterized by the kind of faithfulness we see in Jonathan.

B. There is a second ray of light in the darkness of 1 Samuel 31. Hope shines through the darkness of the chapter in that the word of the Lord is fulfilled. As we see over and over, the Bible which is the word of God is totally true and completely trustworthy, even when what it says to us is not the happy news we would like to hear.

This chapter is a brutal picture of death. The Philistines fight. The Israelites flee. The Philistines strike down Jonathan and his brothers. The Philistines press against Saul. The archers sink arrows into Saul badly wounding him. He falls on his sword and kills himself to try to avoid being tortured by the Philistines. Saul's armor bearer kills himself as well. Then Israelites flee their towns.

It is all sad especially if you are pulling for the Israelites. But there is light in all the darkness. And the light that shines is the trustworthiness and dependability of the word of God. You see, the events of Israel's defeat and the deaths of Saul and his sons take place JUST AS the LORD spoke through Samuel. He had said that the Lord would give Israel, the Israelite army, and Saul and his

sons into the hands of the Philistine army and Saul and his sons would die. We love the promises of God and rejoice in God's faithfulness to keep them. But God's word also speaks warnings and threats and assurances that are sobering and ominous. What he said to Saul was ominous, but the fact that it came to pass just as the Lord had said is evidence that his word is sure. Even the darkness is under the sovereign purpose and plan of God. And his word is absolutely true whether it is a promise to David or a warning to Saul.

The same goes for everyone today. WhoEVER believes in Christ can be ABSOLUTELY SURE that if you believe, you ABSOLUTELY SHALL not perish but have eternal life. The righteous one can know for absolute certain that the Lord will withhold nothing from them that is not for their good. At the same time, whoever does not believe must know for certain that they are already under condemnation. Still, everyone can know this: if you will repent and turn in faith to Christ, your hopelessness will be replaced with indestructible hope. It doesn't matter how dark the dark is, the word of the Lord is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

II. If A Person Is Not Killing Sin, Sin Will be Killing Them.

This is one of the main lessons we learn from the life of Saul. You reap what you sow. If you sow to sin, sin will come back to bite. On several notable occasions in Saul's life, we see that he was not about killing sin. He was more concerned with how he appeared before the people than he was about repenting of sin and obeying God. Let's go back to the time Saul forced himself and offered the offering that Samuel was supposed to offer. Samuel reprimanded Saul and announced to him that God had sought out a man after his own heart and commanded him to be prince over his people. There appeared to be no sorrow or regret on Saul's part. After Samuel's words, Saul just turned and went his way. He seemed to have more important things to do than be sorry or change his ways. Later, Saul obviously had not learned or changed from that situation. When the Lord sent him to eliminate the Amalekites, he explicitly did not do what he was told. And yet he argued to Samuel that he did. When Samuel confronted him, he blamed the people. Samuel further confronted Saul. He explained that rebellion is as the sin of divination and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Saul admitted that he had sinned but all he wanted to do was be granted forgiveness and get on with making a name for himself. Samuel had to kill the king of the Amalekites because Saul continued in resistance.

Saul persisted in rebellion against the Lord by opposing the newly anointed king. Relentlessly he sought David's death. Like Cain, he was overcome by sin. And his heart was full of misery. That is what sin does. And the final end of sin is destruction. The Lord is gracious and merciful and abounding in steadfast love. He forgives sins. But in order to be forgiven, one must repent. A mere admission that we have sinned means nothing if we do not agree with God that sin is evil and wicked, to be hated and rejected, to abandon, to turn and pursue righteousness and obedience in its place. And that is Saul. When at last he sought a word from the Lord, it was too late. He had sinned his opportunity away. Then he went so far as to consult a medium. The Lord confirmed his determination to bring judgment down on Saul. And as I understand the Scripture there was still an opportunity to repent, still an opportunity to change his ways and seek God's face and forgiveness, but he simply went out into the night and the next day found himself on the battlefield wounded with arrows from the archers and then taking his own life.

Be killing sin or sin will be killing you. Saul refused to advance against his sin and his sin advanced against and destroyed him. David is quite the opposite. Think of Psalm 32. David wrote these words: "How blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. ... when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand

was heavy upon me. ... [but] I acknowledged my sin to you, I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgression to the LORD,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.'"

David continued, "Therefore, let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him. You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance."

Relief and shouts of deliverance were not the experience of Saul. Hope was extinguished and death came. He did not kill sin in his life, and sin brought about his death. I saw someone's post on Facebook the other day who said they thought they were lost and without hope. I would say to that person, the only way you can come to the conclusion that you are without hope is if you are determined to refuse to repent. Looking at the tragic end to the life of Saul, that is what we learn. If you do not kill sin, if you determinedly persist in it, it will lead to your destruction. But his example also serves to comfort us that if we would just repent and turn from sin and kill it in our lives, by the power that God supplies, we will be delivered from its curse in stead of being destroyed by it. The Scriptures tell us that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Let me make it clear. I am not saying we can save ourselves from our sin. I am saying that if we will confess it before God and if in our hearts we will forsake it, then through faith in Christ, He will deliver us from its penalty and from its power. But if we persist in unrepentant and wilful sin, a day will come when there is no turning back. Judgment will engulf us and bring us to doom. So hate sin. Flee from sin. Repent of your sin. Make no provision for the flesh. Flee sinful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace along with those call on the Lord from a pure heart.

III. A Person's Life Is a Reflection Upon His God.

The death of Saul was greatly celebrated by the Philistines. When they came the day after battle to strip the slain, they found the bodies of Saul and his sons. They cut off Saul's head and stripped his armor. They put the armor in an idol's temple and hung his body on a wall. Messengers went throughout the land to carry good news. And that good news was that Israel had been drubbed and her king was killed along with his three sons. There was rejoicing in the land and the glory was given to a false god. The Philistines were convinced that their goddess was stronger than the God of Israel. Shame and reproach fell on the nation of Israel, but even more so on the true God. Because his servant had been faithless, the reputation of the Lord was put to shame.

It is a sad fact that the lives of those who serve the Lord and those who profess to serve the Lord are sometimes the basis upon which the reputation of the Lord suffers. Saul's faithlessness on this occasion resulted in shame being brought upon the LORD. The Philistines gave credit to their own deity. They sent out a false gospel that their god was the true god and the God of the Israelites was too weak to lead them to victory.

The Lord points out on several occasions that the way the Israelites lived gave the nations reason to mock the Lord. Isaiah 52:5 says that because of the plight of Israel, the Lord's name was continually despised. Paul referenced this verse in Romans 2 saying that the name of the Lord was being blasphemed among the nations because of the ungodliness and hypocrisy of Israel. Ezekiel 36 speaks about the fact that the house of Israel had profaned the name of the Lord among the nations to which they came. In Ezekiel 43:8 the Lord declares how the Israelites defiled the holy name of the Lord by their ungodliness. Likewise, Saul occasioned shame to fall upon the name of the Lord by his faithlessness.

The name of the Lord is at stake in the lives of those who profess to serve him. In 1 Timothy 6:1 Paul urges Christian bondservants to honor their masters so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. Peter points out that godly behavior puts to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Godliness adorns the gospel and the God who calls us in Christ Jesus. But ungodliness brings shame upon his name.

The love of the Lord should be our great motivation to serve him faithfully and earnestly and to grow in that service day-by-day, but let's remember this other consequence to our disobedience. When we flounder and resist the Lord and when the fruit of the Spirit is lacking in our lives, there is a sad consequence more than simply our dissatisfaction in living. We make God look bad. God forbid that the way we live and talk and behave should be the reason someone persists in serving a false god or believes in no god at all. God forbid that anyone refuses to give an ear to the truth of the gospel because of the sad and ungodly testimony born by our lives.

IV. Even Bad People Can Do Good Things.

In the final scene of the final chapter of 1 Samuel, the spotlight is on the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead. This was an Israelite city on the north and eastern side of the Jordan River. Valiant men from the city learned of the shameful treatment being carried out on the bodies of Saul and his sons and determined to do something about it. They rose and went all night on a twenty-mile round trip. They recovered the bodies and brought them back to Jabesh and treated them with dignity and protection.

The behavior of these citizens demonstrates a regard for Saul. It was appropriate for the men of this town to free Saul's body from despicable treatment. You see, the reign of Saul had commenced with Saul's deliverance of the city. Nahash the Ammonite wanted to bring disgrace on all Israel by gouging out the right eyes of every one of the inhabitants of Jabesh. But they sent messengers to all Israel. Those messengers came also to Saul. The Spirit of God rushed upon Saul. He summoned a large army who went forth and delivered Jabesh by striking down the Ammonites.

Now the people of Jabesh-gilead show their respect and appreciation for what Saul had accomplished for them. Bad as Saul had become, early on he had been used for their deliverance, and they could not forget it. They could not do anything to change the tragic outcome of Saul's death, but they could show regard for the Lord's anointed and they could express gratitude for the mercy they had received through his hand.

And so we can say that God uses even bad or unfaithful people to accomplish good things. And even if their lives have been marked by great failure, we can still be thankful for the good. We can still demonstrate a spirit of gratitude. We can still place dignity where dignity is due.

I think of folks who have had ineffective and unloving parents. The command to honor your father and mother still stands. I also am mindful of folks who live and have lived under rulers and political leaders who are disrespectful. Peter specifically instructs servants to faithful service, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. The behavior of the citizens of Jabesh reminds us to give honor to whom honor is due and of course to the Lord God above all, and all the honor we give elsewhere because we first give honor to Him.

Conclusion

In the end, all the good for which we might receive worldly honor means absolutely nothing if we will not hear the Lord welcome us home with the words, "Well done good and faithful servant, enter into

the joy of your master.” Those are words I firmly believe that Saul did not hear. He sowed to his flesh, the flesh of his pride and self determination. He sowed to disobedience and the neglect of the commands of the Lord. And he reaped what he sowed. He is a clear example of the fact of Paul’s words in Galatians 6—“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”