

## Two Testimonies; One of Honor, One of Shame, Part II

Call to Worship: Psalm 119:57-64

1st Scripture: Romans 9:1-29

2nd Scripture: 1 Samuel 31:1-7

Hymn Insert- *Battle Hymn of the Republic*

Hymn #492- *Take My Life and Let it Be*

Hymn #493- *Who is on the Lord's Side?*

### Introduction:

Last time, we eulogized Jonathan, son of Saul, who died a noble death, in Israel's battle against the Philistines. Standing together before his casket, we pondered the great testimony of honor, left behind, by this beloved man of God, decorated soldier, faithful friend and loyal son. This morning, once again, after taking a brief look at the battlefield, we will move into another viewing room, to consider the testimony (this time, "of shame") left behind by Jonathan's father, Saul, the king of Israel.

The Philistines fought against Israel and prevailed. And the men of Israel fled, and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. The Philistines followed hard after Saul and his sons, and killed his three sons. The battle then became fierce against King Saul, and ultimately a Philistine archer found Saul, with one of his arrows. Saul, being severely wounded, thought it best to have his life taken from him by his own armorbearer, lest the Philistines tortured him, when they found him. However, his armorbearer, wisely refused to lay his hand against the king. And so, Saul took out his own sword and fell on it, so as to take his own life. And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he followed suit, and fell on his own sword, and died with Saul. And in verse 6, we are given the following grievous summary statement, "So Saul, his three sons, his armorbearer, and all his men died together that same day." And following this, we are told that, "when the men of Israel, who were on the other side of the valley, and those who were on the other side of the Jordan, saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them. Indeed, a horrible and tragic conclusion to the Philistines sweeping victory over the Israelites! Judgment had come upon Saul, his house, and his nation, and any joyful, ecstatic moments of the past, had now fizzled down to this present reality. There is a time for everything under the sun. And this was a time for great weeping, mourning and sorrow. And as I said last week, the clouds have been set in place, but only to soon reveal a new sunrise in David's installment upon the throne!

For now then, let us enter the crowded room, containing the casket of the late King, Saul. And let us ponder his testimony of shame, together.

## **II. A Testimony of Shame**

Here lies Israel's first king, Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin. Saul was a troubled and confused man, in many ways, but as we look back, we find that he was the cause of his own hurt. I will never forget the first time I met Saul, when he was anointed Israel's first king. He was a tall, good looking young man, but he hardly had the courage, which is required of a king. But God did something to him. He changed his heart and gave him great boldness. It wasn't until he led the people of Israel to rescue Jabesh Gilead, from out of the hand of the Ammonites, that he gained the respect of all Israel. And the excitement at that time was beyond comprehension. We had a ruler, like the other nations, to lead us, and though we sinned against God by making this request, God honored it, giving us a king after our own hearts...which really was the beginning of the end for Saul anyway. Truly, he was like us, and like Adam our father, and this began to show early on. Needless to say, Saul started out so well, that no one would have ever imagined the plummet he would take, leading to this disgraceful end. Even the prophet Samuel was encouraged and threw his whole heart behind Saul, as his desire was truly to see Israel prosper.

1) The first major test came, in the second year of Saul's reign. And from the standpoint of God, one might rightly say, that Saul's reign truly ended in his second year. Indeed, the pressure was on Saul as the Philistines gathered to fight against Israel, near Gilgal. The Philistine army was massive; "thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude" (1 Sam. 13:5). And furthermore, Saul's army was terrified and distressed, such that many were hiding, "in caves, in thickets, in rocks, in holes, and in pits. And some of the Hebrews crossed over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead" (1 Sam. 13:6-7a). And what was Saul doing? Remaining in Gilgal, waiting for Samuel, and all who remained with him were trembling. Saul was to wait for Samuel to come to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings before God, so that they could seek the will and help of God in the battle. Indeed, very difficult circumstances for Saul, especially as days one, two, three, four, five, six and seven had come, and Samuel was still nowhere in sight.

What would Saul do? Would he continue to wait, in what now have become humanly impossible circumstances, trusting that the God, who even raises the dead, would yet give him

the victory? Or would he take matters into his own hands, and sin against God. Well, the rubber met the road for Saul's faith right there, when he offered the sacrifices himself, failing to wait upon God, by waiting for Samuel. And Samuel arrived right after that, only to declare that Saul's kingdom would not continue. Saul failed the test, as God was seeking a man after His own heart. And his plunge downward, from that point on, was great.

2) The next major plummet, which sealed the deal, came when Saul was commanded (by God) to utterly destroy the Amalekites, and everything in their possession, in fulfillment of a curse, which God had put upon them many years earlier, when Israel wandered through the wilderness, under the leadership of Moses. The instructions given Saul, were very clear: "Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey" (1 Sam. 15:3). And yet, Saul failed to carry out the Lord's orders. We recall that "Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed" (1 Sam. 15:9). Saul coveted the good things and willfully rebelled against God. His gross act of disobedience there, ultimately sealed the coffin for his demise.

3) Following this, God had anointed the young shepherd boy, David, to be king, and He sent a distressing spirit upon Saul, which tormented him, from that day forward. Saul's sin led to his own madness, teaching us that coveting and idolatry; that turning away from God and toward anything else, ultimately leads to torment and madness.

4) Following David's slaying of the giant Goliath, whom Saul, had he faithfully walked with the Lord, perhaps would have gained the courage to fight the giant himself, Saul had become jealous and envious of David, when the people began to acknowledge David as a superior warrior than Saul. And so, Saul began to unrighteously pursue David's life; and his ungodly bitter envy, only grew stronger and stronger, to the point that he had deceived himself into believing that David was somehow pursuing him. Indeed, Saul lied, and committed many evil acts from this point on, blaspheming the Name of the Lord, murdering all of the priests at Nob, and utterly contending with the living God, as a means of seeking to secure the throne, which he had previously forfeited in his acts of disobedience.

5) Though David had been given a few opportunities to kill Saul, he spared his life on each occasion. And while Saul, for a time, expressed sorrow to David, and vowed to leave him

alone, he continually broke his vows, and renewed his efforts of seeking to pursue and kill David.

6) Saul was a selfish, ungodly king, living for the "here and now," with no goal to sincerely repent and pursue God, ever. And this was further seen by the way in which he used his daughters to further his own political advantage, and drove a wedge between himself and his eldest son, Jonathan, whom, as we saw last time, was a dear man of God, who often sought to reason with his father, concerning his unrighteous pursuit of David.

7) Near the end of his life; indeed, the very night before he had died, Saul sought out a medium, in order to conjure up Samuel, because God had refused to respond to Saul, when He was sought by him, concerning the upcoming battle with the Philistines. Saul knew very well that pursuing a medium was an abomination in the sight of God. Indeed, earlier in his reign, he was the one who had killed and exiled, all of the mediums, in keeping with the law of God. And so, this was the final nail, struck down into the coffin of Saul's fate. Samuel was sent to him, and after rebuking him, he had informed him that on the next day, he and his sons would die in the battle against the Philistines.

8) Saul was ultimately the cause of his sons death (three of them, including Jonathan), and Israel's great defeat against the Philistines. And finally, he died as shamefully as he had lived. Saul fell on his own sword, and shamefully took his own life. He died a terrible and hopeless death, with none of the things for which he sacrificed a relationship with God, to accompany him or offer him any means of comfort in those dying moments. Ultimately, the Philistines cut off his head, stripped him of his armor, and hung his headless body on a wall, next to his sons. Was it worth it?

This is the short form summary of Saul's testimony of shame, and now let us move on to close with a few very relevant applications, beginning with that very question.

## **II. Concluding Thoughts and Applications**

1) Was it worth it? Friends, go to the book ends of Saul's life as king. Consider the exciting moment when he was installed by Samuel, and the people had expressed great confidence in his leadership. And then walk that path, and see where he begins to distance himself from following the Lord. Follow the landslide of his morality, and coast right to his end...he is defeated by the Philistines, many of his countrymen and his loyal soldiers are dead,

his sons have fallen by the sword, and the last thing he sees is the blade of his own sword, piercing his internal organs. Was it worth it? Is it worth living life in accordance with the naturally sinful dictates and desires of our own hearts, when we consider the end? Is it worth living life, with all of its trimmings, recognizing the whole time, that you have no relationship with your eternal Creator, the living God?

Non-Christian, young people, consider the paths of Jonathan and Saul, his father. Do you see the measureless value of a good testimony? Consider well, Saul's life. Wouldn't you love to be king? All that money; all that power; all that respect; all that popularity...but in the end, what does any of that mean...any of it?! It is all useless garbage, if you know not Christ in truth! A father and a son, with two very different outcomes. Two different paths of faith, and two very different destinations, and what makes all the difference? One feared God and one did not. One lived for God, at the expense of much in this world, while the other lived for himself, at the expense of walking with God. Being a son or a daughter or a father or a mother, or of any relation to one who knows Christ, brings you no automatic connection to Christ. Many families, throughout all of history have been separated by grace; Jacobs and Esaus, Sauls and Jonathans, Davids and Absaloms...etc. You will never get to heaven on the coattails of anyone else. You must have your own faith...young people!

You were created by God and for God...do you see that? Can you say in your heart, "Lord, how grateful I am to have the breath of life (your breath) in me. Do with me as you please. I am yours, O Lord, and not my own. By Christ and for His glory, redeem me for your own glorious purposes...make me a servant O Lord, not of my flesh, but of Christ!

2) Recognize the reality of God's sovereignty even in these matters. Out of the same lump of fallen earth; out of the same lump of marred clay, God formed an honorable Jonathan and a dishonorable Saul. And He is glorified in the salvation of one and in the expression of His righteous indignation against the other. And thanks be unto God, that God forms "Jonathans," or we all would have become as Sodom and Gomorrah. The corruption of sin is far more powerful than we could ever imagine. It takes nothing less than a resurrection from the dead (from spiritual death in this case), for the human soul to turn to Christ, in faith and in obedience.

3) Never put your confidence in man...ever, be it in a ruler, in a country, in a pastor, in a theologian, in a gifted public speaker...etc. Man will always let you down. Indeed, we pray for righteous rulers to be raised up in our government, but our confidence must always be bound to

the King, King Jesus, whose kingdom is not of this world. There are so many things to love about the freedoms we have enjoyed in our country, but it will never compete with the eternal kingdom of Christ, and it is doomed to fail, as it has been from the beginning. It is indeed sad to witness the death of our nation; it is sad to see that we are presently dwelling in the midst of Sodom, brethren, but this is not our home. And so, let us not cling to the things, which are seen, but rather let us cling to that, which is unseen, so that when the foundation of this doomed country ultimately collapses, we will still stand firm, having settled our faith on the foundations of Christ's invisible and eternal kingdom.

Israel had high hopes for Saul, but in the end, many were fleeing from their homes in fear, as the pipe dream had collapsed on Mount Gilboa. The Philistines will reek havoc on the best of this world's soil, but you will find yourself untouchable in the heavenly places, where we are seated with Christ! Our nation is gasping for air, brethren...and its breaths are spreading further and further apart. The death rattle is coming, probably in our own day. Fix your eyes on Christ, or you will not stand, when all of this comes crashing down!

AMEN!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25